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MELLONEY HOLTSPUR
OR
THE PANGS OF LOVE

JOHN MASEFIELD

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MELLONEY HOLTSPUR

OR

THE PANGS OF LOVE

By JOHN MASEFIELD

King Cole
Gallipoli
Right Royal
The Faithful
Lost Endeavor
A Mainsail Haul
Daffodil Fields
Captain Margaret
The Old Front Line
Esther and Berenice
Multitude and Solitude
The War and the Future
Enslaved and Other Poems
Collected Poems and Plays
Good Friday and Other Poems
Salt Water Poems and Ballads
Tragedy of Nan and Other Plays
The Tragedy of Pompey the Great
Philip the King and Other Poems
Lollingdon Downs and Other Poems
Story of a Round-House and Other Poems
Reynard the Fox, or The Ghost Heath Run
The Locked Chest; and The Sweeps of Ninety-Eight
The Everlasting Mercy and the Widow in the Bye Street

MELLONEY HOLTSPUR

OR

THE PANGS OF LOVE

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

The consecrated things are wiser than our virtue.

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1922
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The consecrated things are wiser than our virtue.

2068045

PERSONS

Kezia Spinfield
Bethia Parkins
The Man in Armour
Melloney Holtspur
Myrtle West
Lonny Copshrews
Jake Holtspur
Minnie Bracknell
Aline Copshrews
Lady Mento
Bunny Mento
Jemima Jones
Peter Jones
Susan Jones
Maria Jones
Lenda Copshrews
Spirits

MELLONEY HOLTSPUR

OR

THE PANGS OF LOVE

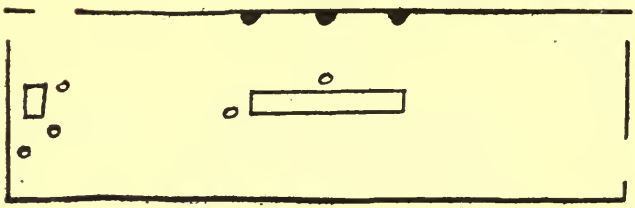
ACT I

[*The scene is a panelled room. At Back, a plain panelled wall with two windows Right and Left. Right at back Center is a figure of a man in fifteenth century plate armour. Directly above the man in armour, let into the panelling of the wall, is the Holtspur device in a Renaissance high relief of coloured plaster: a cock holding a spur, with a motto, In asperis spero. The windows are on each side of this figure. On the Left of the man in armour, hung on the panel, is a portrait of* MELLONEY HOLTSPUR. *On the Right of the figure, balancing it, is a portrait of* LAURENCE COPSHREWS. *At extreme Right Back is a dark doorway leading off.*

On the Right wing there is panelling as at Back, no decorations. Up stage on this side is a passage leading off.

On the Left wing, panelling as at Back and Right, with a fireplace and mantel in the centre of the set.

Both above and below the fireplace on this side is a passage leading off.
In the Centre of the stage is a small, oak refectory table, on which is a book bound in calf. Ink, pens and notepaper lie to right of the book.
To Right of stage is a small table with chairs.



KEZIA SPINFIELD *and* BETHIA PARKINS *are arranging the scene.* BETHIA *is dumpy and dowdy and old.* KEZIA *is taller and smarter and older, with a frail face of some beauty.* BETHIA *enters Left with a tray and is taking it out to the passage Right.*]

KEZIA

No, not there, Bethia. Lady Mento said, "Leave it in the hall." I'll pull the little table out.

[*She goes off Right, then returns, pulling a little wheeled table to Right of stage.*]

Now put it there.

[*Bethia puts down the tray.*]

BETHIA

It's very late, Kezia; I declare it's nearly twelve.

KEZIA

Just let me see if I've forgotten nothing.

BETHIA

There's the note from the Mrs. Trenchard who is dying.

KEZIA

Yes. Lady Mento must have that directly she comes in. Now I will count. The soup, the biscuits, the coffee, the apple for Mr. Bunny, the salted almonds for her ladyship, the water; cups, spoons.

BETHIA

What time will they be back from this dance, Kezia?

KEZIA

Between two and three, I heard them say, but I daresay they'll be later. Miss Copshrews is to be there.

BETHIA

The young lady who is coming here to-morrow?

KEZIA

Miss Lenda Copshrews. She's stopping at Windlesham with Sir Alfred and Lady Jones, and she'll come on from there to-morrow with the four Jones children.

BETHIA

I noticed Master Bunny was very particular about himself.

KEZIA

He has been very particular about himself these nine weeks, ever since he met her first, at Wrocester Hunt Ball.

BETHIA

Have you ever seen her, Kezia?

KEZIA

Yes; often, as a baby. She was brought up at the Rectory here, by her grandfather, old Mr. Copshrews, who was the Rector here twenty odd years ago. They left when they made him Dean of Wrocester and I have not seen her since. That's her photograph, grown up, on Master Bunny's desk.

BETHIA

Twenty odd years soon pass: yet they make a cruel difference.

KEZIA

You only came into the family through her ladyship's husband. You've been with the Mentos all your life. But I've been here among the Holtspurs for sixty-five years, Bethia Parkins. Twenty odd years ago this house was a very different house from what it is now. Old Mr. Jake Holtspur, her ladyship's father, was alive then. He

used to say that no man ever left this house as sober as he entered it; and it was true, too, Bethia. Drink and paintings were the only things he cared for. But he had a grand brain, old Mr. Jake; until her ladyship married.

My lamb, Miss Melloney was alive then. She was his youngest, but he never cared for her.

Twenty odd years ago, she would be singing her French song here, and old Mr. Jake drinking with his friends, and money everywhere, and my love alive.

BETHIA

But who was this Miss Copshrews' father, Kezia?

KEZIA

The Rector's son, Mr. Laurence Copshrews. He was a painter.

BETHIA

What makes you look about you like that, Kezia Spinfield?

KEZIA

I don't like talking of Mr. Laurence Copshrews. He was a live, blind brand of hell. And there's some of him present in this room. That portrait, there, with the green baize screen on it, is Mr. Laurence Copshrews. He painted that.

BETHIA

I'd thought that was her ladyship's brother. He doesn't look such a villain, Kezia. He looks to me to be a handsome young man.

KEZIA

Others thought so, more's the pity.

BETHIA

Was this Miss Lenda Copshrews born in sin, then, Kezia?

KEZIA

No. He married a French singing-woman. Miss Lenda was their only child. But draw the green baize, Bethia. I don't like to feel him looking at me.

BETHIA

Why are these two pictures covered with baize, Kezia?

KEZIA

They are said to be very delicate pictures that must not have the sun on them. And they are very valuable. Old Mr. Jake thought the world of them. He bought several others of Mr. Copshrews' paintings.

BETHIA

[*Moving to portrait Left.*]

Then this is by Mr. Copshrews, too, Kezia? And who might this be?

KEZIA

That is my lamb, Miss Melloney, whom he painted. I entered service here the day she

was born. The day she died was the bitterest day I've known on this earth. It is long ago now, but I cannot bear the thought of it.

BETHIA

It is a sweet face, poor soul. Is it like her?

KEZIA

She was like that: only she had a way with her: a little merry way, that nobody could paint.

BETHIA

And she was never married?

KEZIA

No. Many asked her. Sir Alfred, the father of the little Joneses who are coming, was the one I hoped. But she was not for this world. There was another, better painting of her than this, by Mr. Copshrews, but it was burnt in the fire we had here in Mr. Holtspur's study, just after Mr. Holtspur died.

BETHIA

I heard there was a fire.

KEZIA

A very mysterious fire. To this day no one can understand how it broke out. And there was something about that fire which marked it as a judgment.

BETHIA

What could it have been a judgment for?

KEZIA

A loving of idols, Bethia. That man's paintings were singled out by the fire; they were the only things burned, beside the mantel. Now Heaven defend me!

BETHIA

Whatever is it, Kezia?

KEZIA

Why didn't you draw the green baize curtain when I asked you?

BETHIA

But you can draw it, Kezia; you're nearer to it than I. Such a fuss about a curtain!

KEZIA

It is a fuss about a curtain, but cover his face, do you now.

BETHIA

Why, save us, Kezia Spinfield, you look as though you'd seen a ghost. There's his face covered. A handsome young man with plenty of go in him. I never saw you in such a taking, and all about a graven image!

KEZIA

I could tell you something about that graven image, as you call it, that would bring the sweat upon your palms for fear.

BETHIA

And what might that be, Kezia?

KEZIA

If I tell you, will you promise never to breathe what I tell you to anyone?

BETHIA

I will not tell. I promise that.

KEZIA

I would not tell you or anyone but for other things.
You know that signs come, to those about to die?

BETHIA

They say they do not come as they used to come. Who, here, have signs been coming to?

KEZIA

They have been coming to me, Bethia, in these last nights, and so I know that I'm not long for this world. First the death-watch, but that I paid little heed to, since there are many dying, up and down; but then, two nights ago, there was the night-cock, crowing till the rafters rang, and all a-glimmer in the air; so then I said, "If there comes another sign, I shall know it is for me." And last night the Rider came. He came clop clep, clop clep, just at midnight, and stopped just below, in the road. I could see him there, Bethia, a rider on a white horse, with a led horse at his side. It was full moon, Bethia, and he looked at me and nodded. So I shan't see the swallows go that are now come, nor the fruit that is now blossom, but I shall be with my lovely Miss Melloney, Bethia, where blossom will never fade nor fruit fail.

BETHIA

It's a blessed thing to be so ready, Kezia Spinfield.

KEZIA

After ten times seven
Man is ready for Heaven,
And after ten times eight
He does not want to wait.

And now I will tell you what it is that troubles me about that picture, if it be a picture.

BETHIA

What else could it be, Kezia, my good soul?

KEZIA

A sending, from him in hell, to damn folk. Didn't I see it bewitch you a moment ago, just as he would have bewitched you in life? There is this about the picture, Bethia. Every night, when her ladyship has gone to bed, I creep down here with a long stick, and I push the curtain over him, with the stick, so as to shut him up, so that he shan't get out.

BETHIA

This it is to live and learn!

KEZIA

And every morning, Bethia Parkins, when I come down, the curtain is drawn back, so that his wicked face is free.

BETHIA

Every morning?

KEZIA

For the last nine weeks. Ever since Master Bunny met his daughter.

BETHIA

Kezia!

KEZIA

It's drawn right back. He's opened his door and got out, and who knows what wickedness he's done!

BETHIA

But he's dead, Kezia; he's dead and gone.

KEZIA

So are a many dead and gone that work evil. I've signed that curtain with blessed water from the font, but he's stronger than the sign.

BETHIA

Mightn't it be that new maid, Parsons, when she dusts the room, first thing? She might draw the curtain to look at him.

KEZIA

It's none of the maids, Bethia.

BETHIA

It might be her ladyship or Master Bunny, Kezia. Master Bunny's taken up with painting and that. And he's up and about at all hours.

KEZIA

It's not them. I've taken my Bible into the corner there and left the light burning and watched.

BETHIA

What did you see, then, Kezia?

KEZIA

At first I saw nothing and heard nothing, and I fell into a doze, in spite of myself. But I was waked by a great clang, like the trump of doom.

BETHIA

What was it? Had something fallen?

KEZIA

What was there to fall?

BETHIA

A picture, perhaps, or a window blown open, or a log burned through in the hearth, or one of the fire-irons falling, or a draught knocking down a vase of flowers, or a dead bough outside, falling from one of the trees.

KEZIA

This was none of those. It was a clang like iron, and it called with a voice, and it seemed to come from Sir Tirrold Holtspur, the man in armour there.

BETHIA

Did you hear what it said?

KEZIA

As sure as I stand here, it cried, "Another day is dead!" And another day was dead, Bethia, for I could hear the church bells, that chime every third hour, chiming for midnight, "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended."

BETHIA

Kezia, I suppose Sir Tirrold Holtspur isn't in the armour? There's no man in the armour?

KEZIA

No, indeed, it's only like his suit of clothes.

BETHIA

I've heard of men being in the armour, and unable to rest. Who was this Sir Tirrold?

KEZIA

The founder of the family, they say. He was in the Wars of the Roses, at the Battle here. But whatever the voice was, Bethia, it was after the voice that the thing came.

BETHIA

What thing?

KEZIA

I don't know, but something came into the room from over there. [*Points to Right Back.*] Something unhappy.

BETHIA

But you saw it? What did it look like?

KEZIA

No, I didn't see it. I felt it. And it came quite near, and it saw me and didn't mind me; it was friendly to me, though I was terrified of it.

BETHIA

What was it, do you suppose?

KEZIA

Lord, save us, Bethia, I believe it was he, out of the picture!

BETHIA

The hallows be good to us!

KEZIA

I'm sure it was, for, after a little, I felt it go over to the picture there; and as sure as I stand here, it drew back the curtain and looked at Miss Melloney. Then, after a minute, it went over to his portrait, and I saw the curtain travel back from it. The rings clinked and the baize moved.

BETHIA

And what happened then, Kezia?

KEZIA

I believe it went into the picture, like a spider going into his den. That was its home; there it stayed, looking out. And I was weak with terror. I backed out and away, holding my Bible against it. I've prayed for him since, Bethia, that he might find peace. But he is too strong. And he is evil to this house.

BETHIA

You of the Holtspurs take things to heart too much. Why is he evil to this house?

KEZIA

He brought death here.

BETHIA

Whose death?

KEZIA

We'll be going to our rests, Bethia.

BETHIA

You mean your Miss Melloney in the picture?

KEZIA

I mean all whom ever he touched.

BETHIA

How did he bring death to your Miss Melloney?

KEZIA

How does any Judas bring death?

[BETHIA *nods.*]

And now to-morrow his daughter will bring death to Master Bunny.

BETHIA

No, no, Kezia. Her ladyship will save Master Bunny, if it be a case of saving.

KEZIA

She'll snare mother and son as he snared father and daughter. He brought death in his touch and so will she.

BETHIA

She was all in all to you, your Miss Melloney.

[KEZIA *nods.*]

And she died, of a kiss.

KEZIA

No matter how she died.

BETHIA

When it is all summed, when we come to our ends, we women, we had rather have that than the nothing some of us have.

KEZIA

Maybe, woman. I had a love once, withered as I am. He could not marry me. He had to tend his old mother, and died before her.

BETHIA

I never had that. I'd nothing.

KEZIA

Nothing?

BETHIA

There was one I used to watch for, riding by; but he never knew. He was killed in the Egypt War. I could have died, of a kiss.

KEZIA

At this moment, at the dance, Master Bunny would die for one. May them of this house guard their own, from the evil here and evil coming. Amen. Give me your arm, woman. Since my Miss Melloney died it's been an uphill road with me; but there's rest from it all at the end.

[They go out, Left. After a minute's delay, a clock, off to the Right, strikes twelve, and chimes. The figure of SIR TIRROLD HOLTSPUR *cries, "Another Day is Dead!"*

[The room is quite dark, except for the moonlight that comes in from the windows over the portraits. As these have scutcheons in them, the light on the floor has colour in it.

The ghost of MELLONEY HOLTSPUR *is seen moving silently on to the stage from the door down stage Left. She is in white, and is crying silently. She moves gropingly to the centre of the stage.*]

MELLONEY HOLTSPUR

I am Melloney Holtspur, the last of old Jake Holtspur's daughters. I cannot rest. [*She comes down.*] I died, in the room above this, eighteen years ago. There were three of us girls; Hester, and Julia, and I. Hester married. Julia married. I did not marry anyone. Julia Mento has this old house now; she with her boy, Bunny, whom I love.

Twenty-two years ago at Easter time! Twenty-two years ago, two hundred and sixty-four months, eleven hundred and forty-four weeks, what a lot of days, what a lot of nights, unable to rest!

[*Calls.*]

Lonny! Lonny! — No. He never comes. Lonny! Lonny Copshrews! Lonny Copshrews!

He was the man I wished to marry; that was long ago, when I was a girl. Lonny Copshrews was the man I loved. One can only love once, they say; it is true. No one could love twice, like this. Love is strong as death, we used to say. It is a great deal stronger.

Lonny Copshrews painted me. [*She looks at the portrait Left.*] Such a one I was, this past. He has caught the look to the life. He was a marvellous artist, but a very wicked man. But, wicked or not, I love him. [*She leaves the portrait and goes to the centre near the man in armour.*] One, two, three, four. Four years between that day and my death. But really I died that day. [*She calls again.*] I am so unhappy; so unhappy!

One, two, three, four. Eighteen years since my death, and four years before that, twenty-two years.

All the Holtspurs who ever were are in this house. They can help me. Won't you help me? Sir Tirrold Holtspur, you who founded the family, and were so brave, you can comfort me. [*She turns to the man in armour. She comes groping down the stage.*]

There are no Holtspurs now. Only Julia's boy, Bunny. Watching Julia and Bunny is my only joy. And little Susan Jones, who is coming here to-morrow, I love her. [*She goes up stage to look at portrait Right.*] Lonny! Lonny Copshrews! Why were you so cruel to me? Oh, you beautiful thing! That is exactly you. Just as you were twenty-two years ago, in this room, at this time of the year. This is what happened in this room at this time of the year, twenty-two years ago.

[*The scene changes to daylight, so that all the room can be clearly seen.*
Enter MYRTLE WEST *with* LAURENCE COPSHREWS, *Right Back.* LAURENCE COPSHREWS *carries a package of about 24″ × 15″ in his left hand. He is twenty-nine.*]

MYRTLE

Miss Holtspur. Oh, sir, she is not here after all. She must be upstairs. I'll go to look for her.

LONNY

Thanks.

MYRTLE

What name shall I say, sir?

LONNY

Copshrews. Laurence Copshrews.

MYRTLE

Oh, yes, sir.

LONNY

Not the Rector, but from Paris, say.

MYRTLE

Very good, sir.

[*Exit* MYRTLE *Left Back.*]

LONNY

A jolly pretty girl, that.

[MELLONEY *enters Left Back almost at once. She is twenty-five.*]

MELLONEY

[*Shaking hands.*]
Why, Lonny, welcome back from Paris. You're very unexpected, aren't you?

LONNY

I'm not often expected at my home, even if I say I'm coming.

MELLONEY

Still, here you are. How is Paris?

LONNY

It's all right, for those that like that kind of thing.

MELLONEY

Your father will be a glad man. It must be two years since you were here.

LONNY

It isn't. It's fifteen months and odd days.

MELLONEY

You're very exact about it.

LONNY

I've reason to be exact. It was the last time I saw you.

MELLONEY

It has seemed like two years to your father.

LONNY

So he said. I don't like my father.

MELLONEY

I know. I cannot think why.

LONNY

He has been the thing I've had to fight since I was five.

MELLONEY

Now that you have beaten him, you can be generous.

LONNY

I don't know that I have beaten him.

MELLONEY

You've made your own way. You're famous.

LONNY

I'm notorious. That doesn't prove him wrong about me. Why did he put me into that insurance office when I was only fifteen?

MELLONEY

He wanted to be sure that you had a calling to be a painter.

LONNY

In the divine arts everybody is called, but people like my father intervene. And he had had fair warning not to interfere with me. He tried the same game on my brother Bill, and Bill ran away to sea. He was drowned somewhere off Sydney Heads on the day I was born. I wish Bill had lived. I can't tell you how much I wish that Bill had lived.

MELLONEY

You mean that you would have loved to have had a brother?

LONNY

I? No, I'd have knocked his head off, or he mine. No, for a very different reason.

MELLONEY

What? May I know?

LONNY

I'll tell you some day. I suppose my father is loved?

MELLONEY

Very much.

LONNY

People go to him in trouble and that kind of thing?

MELLONEY

They do.

LONNY

When he dies, they'll all turn out, to carry him to his grave?

MELLONEY

I hope that that will not be for many years to come.

LONNY

But they will?

MELLONEY

Yes, Lonny; all the village.

LONNY

That is the test, I suppose: what they think of you while you are still new to your coffin. They'd weep and they'd bring wreaths.

MELLONEY

Would not you, Lonny?

LONNY

Weep, and lay flowers for my father? No, by God. [*He moves rapidly over to Right and lights a cigarette.*]

MELLONEY

Lonny! [*No answer.*] Lonny! [*No answer.*] I won't have you here, Lonny, if you swear.

LONNY

All right; turn me out. Do.

MELLONEY

I don't want to turn you out. I want you not to speak like that.

LONNY

I'll speak my mind.

MELLONEY

Do. You have a beautiful mind. But that was not your mind: that was your Devil.

LONNY

You ought to be sorry for a Devil. He is in hell.

MELLONEY

What do you mean by that?

LONNY

In hell? In the depths of himself. But I'd rather be in hell than safe in the fold with a sheep like my father.

MELLONEY

Lonny, I won't hear your father abused. He is a good priest and a devoted, unselfish man.

LONNY

You prefer him to your own father, don't you?

MELLONEY

Lonny, that's not fair.

LONNY

Miss Melloney Holtspur doesn't get on with her father. I can't think why.

MELLONEY

I should have thought you could have guessed why.

LONNY

Perhaps I have guessed. You're very like your mother, and you are still on your mother's side, against your father, who was a beast to her. But I do get on with your father: I like him. He's real. Not many ruined squires could have built up this big cement works. Besides, he was the first man here to see what I am, and he buys my pictures. He doesn't pay me enough for them.

MELLONEY

Who could?

LONNY

He could. And then, Melloney, he's your father, and I find him damned useful as a dictionary.

MELLONEY

What do you mean?

LONNY

You're a very interesting book to me, Miss Melloney Holtspur.

MELLONEY

And do you think you can read me?

LONNY

I don't want to read you. I want to get you by heart. But I come upon all sorts of words that I don't understand, and then I look them up in the dictionary.

MELLONEY

Do you find them in your dictionary?

LONNY

Sometimes. But sometimes I only find them in the dark night when I can't sleep, when I go up and down in my mind, and trace out what you are. This life is a mysterious game, and we only play half our game ourselves.

MELLONEY

Surely we live our own lives, Lonny.

LONNY

I'm not so sure. But I'm sure it would have been a very miserable game for me, but for you. By God, when my father beat me and I wanted to kill him or myself, you were the only bright thing left. By God, you were an angel to me. However, you look out. Those who are angels to me get chastened. Save a rogue from the gallows and he'll cut your throat. Now I've warned you.

MELLONEY

I've already been warned, thank you, Lonny.

LONNY

Oh? Come on out, then, and have a set of tennis.

MELLONEY

We can't. The court's not marked.

LONNY

Is your dog Sam alive still?

MELLONEY

Very much alive.

LONNY

Well, you go and get Sam and I'll go and get my gun, and we'll have a bit of ratting round the granary. Your father wouldn't mind.

MELLONEY

We can't, Lonny. Julia's here with her baby boy, and you'd wake him.

LONNY

I didn't know Julia had a baby. What's his name?

MELLONEY

We call him Bunny. He's nine months old.

LONNY

I'm glad Julia's got a baby. I'm very fond of your sister Julia, and I pity her. Mento's made a pot of money over those breakwaters he builds, but he drinks like a fish, and he doesn't buy my pictures. I wanted to paint Julia, and she'd have been willing, but he beat down my price till I could only do a drawing.

MELLONEY

Did you do a drawing? I don't remember one.

LONNY.

No. I told him to clear out and get a tin-type taken. Chaps like Mento want a lesson now and then that genius is cheap at any price. Mento! He dropped ten thousand tons of concrete into the sea and they knighted him because it sank! I could have made him immortal by painting Julia; fairly immortal, that is; immortal enough for him.

MELLONEY

You might paint her now for me, Lonny, if you'd take the commission.

LONNY

Well, I won't take the commission, not from you. Besides, I shan't be here. I'm going.

MELLONEY

Going? After just coming! Back to Paris?

LONNY

No fear! I've done with Paris.

MELLONEY

Where, then?

LONNY

Some place.

MELLONEY

Are you in any trouble, Lonny?

LONNY

Trouble? Yes, I'm a Devil, outside the pale.

MELLONEY

Could I help in any way?

LONNY

Yes.

MELLONEY

How?

LONNY

You could shoot me dead.

MELLONEY

Lonny, never speak like that, no matter what trouble you are in. Come and tell me the trouble. Are you in want of money, or worried about your work, or in a mess with someone, or what is it?

LONNY

It's all of those things.

MELLONEY

Then sit down here and we'll get it all straight, just as we used to in the old days. First, you're in want of money. How much money?

LONNY

You can go to blazes!

MELLONEY

I don't like blazes, Lonny. I like keeping cool. How much did you say?

LONNY

Both hands in the till.

MELLONEY

Fifty pounds?

LONNY

I'm not good at sums.

MELLONEY

I'll give you fifty pounds for a pastel of Julia, or for two charcoal drawings, one of Julia, one of Bunny. I'll write you a cheque now.

LONNY

You will just kindly go to hell. Damn it! I wish I didn't swear so.

MELLONEY

I wish you didn't, Lonny.

LONNY

But you go a bit too far with me, offering me money like a damned picture-dealer. You aren't going to give me money. You're on the free list with me. What I am is yours, all that's holy of me.

MELLONEY

I'm sorry I mentioned money, Lonny. We will pass to the next matter. Now "damns have had their day," remember. One more damn or hell, and I ring for Kezia to show you out. Now be your nice self and say you're sorry.

LONNY

You shouldn't have insulted me with your charity.

MELLONEY

I won't have my æsthetic sense called names. Now, why are you worried about your work?

LONNY

Because I've gone outside the pale, and become a Devil. D'you think I care for this green earth? I don't. I've put to sea from it, and my art's my boat, and the sea's rough and my boat's leaky. Worried about my work? I've given my soul for it, and, after all, it isn't good, it isn't good.

MELLONEY

It is good, Lonny.

LONNY

It isn't good enough.

MELLONEY

What have you been painting? You haven't been exhibiting.

LONNY

Do you follow my work?

MELLONEY

Of course I do.

LONNY

Women don't like art; it's their only rival. They don't care for art; they've too much sense. They want their loves to be returned, so they love the artists, not what the artists love. What is art to you? What do you suppose it is to me? There's nobody, nobody on this green earth, I wouldn't sacrifice. There's nobody I haven't sacrificed. And all just to draw a line. There. There is a line. It isn't the line of a master.

MELLONEY

It's the line of one who will be a master. No one has been a master at your age.

LONNY

You lie, to make me happy with failure.

MELLONEY

I speak the truth so that you may not believe the cowardly lie you are telling yourself. You know that you are a great painter. How dare you deny the holy spirit in yourself?

LONNY

How can a holy spirit touch a creature like me?

MELLONEY

Because you've got to interpret it to men.

LONNY

Why doesn't it touch me, then?

MELLONEY

It does.

LONNY

It did. Now there is a blank; there is blackness, deadness, dryness. I've sacrificed everything for Emptiness.

MELLONEY

What mess have you been getting into, Lonny? Is it one that you can tell me about?

LONNY

This world is the mess. I ought not to have been born. It's my brother Bill's fault in a way. If he'd been placid and an ass, like my

father, he would have stayed at home and been a comfort, as they call it. He would have done. I wouldn't have been wanted. I wouldn't have been born. All they gat me for was to be a consolation to my mother, who died when I was one. But for Bill they might have left me alone. I'd have been in the night of nothing. And all this suffering wouldn't have been.

MELLONEY

What suffering?

LONNY

The suffering I bring wherever I go.

[*Enter* KEZIA SPINFIELD, *Left Back. She sees* LONNY *and is visibly discomposed, but advances down stage.*]

MELLONEY

Yes, Kezia?

KEZIA

It is Minnie Bracknell, Miss Melloney, come over from Nap Hill from Mrs. Holyport.

MELLONEY

Oh, yes, I had forgotten! Excuse me, Lonny. I'll go to her, Kezia.

[*Exit, Left Back.*]

LONNY

Good-morning, Miss Spinfield.

[KEZIA *gulps. They eye each other.*]

Did you speak?

KEZIA

No, Mr. Copshrews.

LONNY

My mistake. [*They eye each other.*]

KEZIA

Mr. Copshrews —

LONNY

Yes?

KEZIA

You had best go out of this house, sir.

LONNY

Why?

KEZIA

Then you won't bring suffering where it isn't deserved.

LONNY

I don't know what you are talking about.

KEZIA

You understand me well enough, Master Laurence. You can lose me my bread by complaining. You've no business to be here, sir.

LONNY

What do you mean by no business? You mind your own business, in your own kitchen, with your own broom. Lord, you take something on yourself!

KEZIA

I do, Master Laurence, I take a great deal on myself.

LONNY

Well, spare yourself the trouble, where I'm concerned.

KEZIA

I would I could, Mr. Copshrews. You're not a fit associate for those who live here.

LONNY

Are you?

KEZIA

I am a servant here, Mr. Laurence. I try to do my duty.

LONNY

Try to know your place.

KEZIA

It does not become you to remind me of my place, Mr. Copshrews. What one does in the place gives the station. You are presuming too much in coming to Miss Holtspur. There's a woman now at this door, Mr. Copshrews.

LONNY

What woman is that?

KEZIA

Minnie Bracknell, that you painted when you were here last, that you made the talk of Nap Hill.

LONNY

The dirty mind, and the dirty tongue, and the dirty soul of Nap Hill make the talk of Nap Hill, and the blackbeetle soul of the brick

Bethel makes you. Now you clear right out of here, Kezia Spinfield, or, old as you are, I'll set Devils on you. I am drawing you, now, and making your graven image, and if ever you presume to speak to me again like this, I'll burn you in a slow fire and make you dwindle away. Do you know what you ought to do?

KEZIA

My duty to those I love, Mr. Copshrews.

LONNY

No. Your duty to those you hate. Paint your cheeks and gather roses, and run naked through the streets, and take your fill of love until the even. Then you may know more of the sinners for whom Christ died. You vinegar in the salad of your neighbour's sin, get out!

KEZIA

I am going, Mr. Copshrews. It is no very great credit to a gentleman to miscall a servant. But I've seen you what you are and told you; no fit company in this house. Pride will be known, Master Copshrews, and sin punished.

LONNY

O, la, la!

[*Exit* KEZIA, *Left.*]

I wonder how much that old Devil really

knows! However, now that the coast is clear, I'll return my borrowings. Is the coast clear?

[*He takes a package from his pocket, goes rapidly to Back of Stage near* MAN IN ARMOUR, *moves a catch, opens a panel, puts the package inside the panel and closes it. As he comes down stage, old* JAKE HOLTSPUR *enters, Right Back.*]

Good Lord! here's her father. How d'ye do Mr. Holtspur?

JAKE

Ah, Copshrews! Going strong? You look very guilty about something. Been pinching the plate?

LONNY

You gave me rather a start, sir. You're looking well, sir. Have you been finding any more Gainsboroughs?

JAKE

Not I, by the Lord Harry! There are too many looking for them. Have you been painting any more romantics?

LONNY

I've one I'd like you to see.

JAKE

You're at the Rectory? I'll come over to see it. Not to-day, though. I'm going now to town to see my Doctor. He's cutting down my alcohol, and at my age it's bad to

alter habits. Have they given you a drink or anything? Will you have a glass of port or something?

LONNY

No, thanks, Mr. Holtspur, I may be painting this afternoon.

JAKE

I've got some very nice port still, for I don't drink it much myself. It's too sugary for my complaint. When I was young, my father told me to keep it for my old age. Now in my old age, by gad, I daren't drink it!

LONNY

A case of "If youth but knew!"

JAKE

Gladiator port, too; worth a guinea a pint. A very pretty tipple, Mr. Copshrews. But I don't like this abstinence of yours. You can't paint if you don't drink. Have a Kummel, that can't do you any harm.

LONNY

No, nothing, thank you, Mr. Holtspur.

JAKE

You make me seem very inhospitable. Let me see, have I done anything in your line? I bought the Colway Millet since I saw you, Les Vanneurs. Are you still Schwärming for Millet? He used to be rather a pet of yours, didn't he?

LONNY

He was one of my toys when I was a child. I've sucked the paint off now and he's lost his taste.

JAKE

Who is the present man?

LONNY

Whom I admire? Myself. A jolly good painter, Mr. Holtspur.

JAKE

Well, there's nothing like faith, is there? There was something I wanted to ask you about. Could you look at some pictures for me, on the old terms?

LONNY

My prices have doubled.

JAKE

Well, that was only to be looked for. Come and have a gin cocktail and talk it over. At least, have the cocktail; we must have the talk later. I've got to start. I'll come over to-morrow to see your picture. You must try to overcome this drought of yours. I don't like it. There's drought enough in the other world, by all accounts.

[*He goes out, Left Back.*]

Con Dios!

[*Enter* MELLONEY *at Back Right, leading* MINNIE BRACKNELL.]

MELLONEY

Just wait for one moment, Minnie; I'll write a note. [*Sits to write at table.* MINNIE *stands Right.*]

LONNY

Why, Minnie, how are you?

MINNIE

Nicely, thank you, sir.

LONNY

And how is little Bobby?

MINNIE

He's gone away, now, sir, back to his mother's.

LONNY

What times those were on the ice that Christmas, with Bobby and the sledge! You're looking very well.

MINNIE

Thank you, sir. Are you keeping on with your painting, sir?

LONNY

Yes. I still keep on with it.

MELLONEY

This is the note for Mrs. Holyport, Minnie; and the linen will go over by the carrier.

MINNIE

Thank you, Miss. Good-morning, Miss. [*Exit Right.*] Good-morning, sir.

MELLONEY

Good-morning. I forgot that you knew Minnie. Let me see. You painted her, did you not?

LONNY

Remy and I both drew her a year ago, when Remy was here with me.

MELLONEY

Did you think her pretty?

LONNY

Yes, fruit is pretty: that's why it gets eaten.

MELLONEY

Even forbidden fruit?

LONNY

That's eaten first: see Genesis.

MELLONEY

Did you taste this fruit?

LONNY

No, but I was a damned fool not to, if that's the kind of thing you think.

MELLONEY

I do not like your Monsieur Remy.

LONNY

He is a good friend and quite a good painter.

MELLONEY

A man may be all that and yet a very bad influence.

LONNY

Well, he's coming to live here next year, so you can reform him. Who's the new maid you've got?

MELLONEY

The maid who let you in? Myrtle West.

LONNY

She's pretty.

MELLONEY

You'd better paint her.

LONNY

I was thinking so.

MELLONEY

What did you do to Kezia while I was out of the room?

LONNY

I've an old feud with that old hag.

MELLONEY

She's a dear soul, Lonny, and she's shaking like a leaf.

LONNY

She shouldn't believe evil, then.

MELLONEY

What have you done to make her believe evil?

LONNY

I've got to be myself, I suppose. Once, when I was a boy, she caught me trying to raise the Devil.

MELLONEY

You?

LONNY

I had to have some antidote to my father.

MELLONEY

You might have stopped short of the Devil, I should have thought.

LONNY

I did. He didn't come. I wasn't worth it. But I believe in the Devil. He was the first artist to quarrel with the Royal Academy.

MELLONEY

Now, Lonny, that is enough. I will not permit it. You must please go. You've been very rude to me. You have upset a poor old woman, and you make these offensive and blasphemous attempts at jokes.

LONNY

So you turn me out?

MELLONEY

Yes, I do, unless you will apologise.

LONNY

Well, I won't apologise. Remember, if I go now, you'll not see me within these doors again.

MELLONEY

Very well, Lonny.

LONNY

Very well, then. I hope you'll have a happy life with your Kezia They'll make you elder at the Bethel if you keep on. Or even a prophet at the Ebenezer. Good-bye. [*Turns Right.*]

MELLONEY

Good-bye, Lonny.

LONNY

And I'll paint Myrtle West *and* Minnie Bracknell.

MELLONEY

Paint whom you like, Lonny.

LONNY

I shall.

[*Exit, Right.*]

MELLONEY

Lonny?

LONNY

What?

MELLONEY

Aren't you forgetting something?

LONNY

[*Turning.*]

To shake hands? No.

MELLONEY

No. I meant this parcel.

LONNY

Damn the parcel!

MELLONEY

It is yours, isn't it?

LONNY

[*Turns and flings parcel into fireplace.*] There, to hell with it!

MELLONEY

You missed hell by two feet.

LONNY

[*Takes the* HOLTSPUR BOOK *and flings it on the floor.*] There! *He turns, stamping and raging to the Right.*]

MELLONEY

Oh, Lonny, Lonny, Lonny! Come.

LONNY

Come where? You shouldn't madden me. It's all your fault. You know the kind of beast I am. [*He comes down Centre to face her and flings himself on his knees.*] I've been a wild beast. Here's my knife. Cut my heart out, or I'll cut off my fingers one by one. I will. I swear I will! Well, if you think I'm joking, here's the first.

MELLONEY

Lonny, give me that knife; give it here. How dare you be so weak!

LONNY

I've been a beast to you, Melloney, and I'm going to do penance. Well, I'll put my hands in the fire. [*Runs at fire. She stops him.*]

MELLONEY

No, no, Lonny, dear. I don't want you to do penance. But pick up your drawings; they are drawings?

[*He does so.*]

And now pick up our book. It is the Holtspur Book; manuscript from three centuries.

[*He picks it up and dusts it.*]

David Mento thinks that a poem in the manuscript alludes to a hidden treasure here.

LONNY

Oh?

MELLONEY

There's the poem. David thinks there may be a sliding panel connected with the man-in-armour.

LONNY

Did he find one?

MELLONEY

No.

LONNY

Well, if the Scotchman didn't find the treasure, the Englishman need not look.

MELLONEY

I thought you would be thrilled at the thought of a secret hoard.

LONNY

I'm not thrilled by anything except the sense of your goodness to me. Why are you always like God Almighty to me?

[*He takes her hand. She pats his hand and puts it from her.*]

MELLONEY

We're friends. I want you to show me your drawings.

LONNY

There are the drawings, then.

[*He moves away, Right.*]

MELLONEY

But these are finished pictures!

LONNY

There are drawings underneath.

MELLONEY

But these are splendid!

LONNY

They're the best things I've done. That one's Yseult. Do you mind my painting you for Yseult?

MELLONEY

I'm much touched, Lonny.

LONNY

The other's Guinevere. You'll be vexed at my painting you for Guinevere.

MELLONEY

I am very proud, Lonny.

LONNY

Yseult — Guinevere. Both took up with the fool. Yseult married a fool like me. Guinevere married a fool like my father. A wicked fool and a formal fool, whose touch was death. You be warned from the fool. I've warned you now, fairly. They were beautiful women, who could have married anybody; but only the fool wanted them, to that point.

MELLONEY

The best men in the world gave their lives for them.

LONNY

Ah! devotion, when it is too late; the best men are full of that. But the fools saw what

they were. Folly goes with vision; folly and death.

Melloney, you do not know what you have been to me for all these years.

MELLONEY

I know what you are to me.

LONNY

Pah! what is that? If I were to die, it would not matter to you, but if you were to die, it would kill me.

MELLONEY

Perhaps if you were to die my life might not seem worth while.

LONNY

What difference could my death make to you?

MELLONEY

I think it would make all the difference.

LONNY

Melloney, answer me one thing. Three nights ago I could stand it no longer; I was in Paris; I called you and you answered. Was that you?

[MELLONEY *nods.*]

You held out your hands to me, like that, and I took them, and it was all like a transfiguration.

[MELLONEY *nods.*]

Over all those miles — my God! that was your real answer to me?

MELLONEY

I knew you wanted me, so I stood at my window and turned to you, and I know I reached you, and I was proud.

LONNY

And happy?

MELLONEY

Very happy. Intensely happy, for a time.

LONNY

Only for a time?

MELLONEY

Yes. Afterwards I had a terrible dream about you.

LONNY

What did you dream?

MELLONEY

I cannot bear to think of it; it was so unlike you. You struck me over the face, a blow that made me reel.

LONNY

But that was only a dream, Melloney. Dreams go by contraries.

MELLONEY

This was no ordinary dream.

LONNY

Nor was the other, when we met and held hands; that was the heart of life; our two souls understood each other.

MELLONEY

Yes. That was the heart of life, Lonny!

LONNY

Melloney, beloved!

MELLONEY

Oh, Lonny, you mustn't call me that!

LONNY

Why not? It is what you are.

MELLONEY

No, no, Lonny.

LONNY

Don't you like being called that?

MELLONEY

Yes, dear, it was very sweet. But you called me that in the dream.

LONNY

My heart's darling, then, that I love and worship. Is that better?

MELLONEY

It could not be better.

LONNY

Melloney, all these years I've longed to take your head in my hands, as I do now. It is like holding the Host; my God, I've painted this head and worshipped this head with all I am and can be.

MELLONEY

Oh, Lonny, darling!

LONNY

No, I'm not fit to kiss you, Melloney. I've been all down in the slough. I'm all rayed red with it. [*Pause.*] Your life is running into me like spring in a beechwood.

MELLONEY

[*Kissing his hand.*]
Lonny, my lover, you'll not strike me with this hand, will you?

LONNY

Oh, Melloney! you mustn't do that. I'm not worthy.

MELLONEY

Promise you never will.

LONNY

Of course I never will.

MELLONEY

Because it would kill me if you did.

LONNY

Melloney, darling, put the nightmare away. Your eyes are all haunted with it. Your eyes are black and burning. Shut your eyes. [*He kisses her.*]

MELLONEY

Oh, Lonny! Oh, Lonny!

LONNY

My God, I'll always bless the apple-blossom, because it brought me to you!

MELLONEY

Life has not much to offer us after that.

LONNY

Whatever the past was, or the future may be, we'll have had that. And this. [*He kisses her again.*]

[*Enter* KEZIA SPINFIELD *at Right Back. She sees them and is aghast.*]

KEZIA

Miss Melloney! [*She advances down stage and the lovers break.*] Miss Melloney!

MELLONEY

Yes, Kezia, what is it?

KEZIA

There's somebody called, Miss Melloney.

MELLONEY

Who is it, do you know?

KEZIA

It's a lady, Miss Melloney, to speak to Mr. Copshrews.

LONNY

What lady?

[*Enter* MME. ALINE.]

MME. ALINE

This lady. Your wife.

LONNY

So you followed me!

MME. ALINE

You did not think to give me the sleep? This, mademoiselle, is my husband; the father of my daughter, Mees Lenda Copshrews, aged three months, now at your Rectoree.

MELLONEY

I did not know, Madam, that your husband was a married man.

MME. ALINE

We have been married fifteen months.

MELLONEY

And you have a little daughter. You will excuse me. [*Going Left.*] I hope the little daughter may grow up to every beauty and every happiness. Kezia, will you come with me?

[*She bows. They go off, Back Left.*]

MME. ALINE

Well, Laurence?

LONNY

You've put yourself in the cart, I hope you know.

MME. ALINE

Comment?

LONNY

You've done for yourself. You followed me and you came here. By George, that's the very last!

MME. ALINE

Won't you come back with me and start again?

LONNY

No, I won't. Is that plain enough? *Je m'en fiche.* I've done with you. I thought you knew that a year ago. But after this — Anyhow, we've no place here. Get out!

MME. ALINE

Will you get out? Will I see you? There is to discuss.

LONNY

You will see me, sure enough. There is to discuss; you're right. Now go.

[ALINE *goes, Back Right.* LONNY *comes to table, Centre.*]

LONNY

No more need of these things! [*He wraps the drawings carelessly and flings them into the hiding-place. Then picks up the drawing of* KEZIA.] That's the last drawing I shall do. I'll sign and date it. My last; then the date — What the devil is the date? Signed L. C. There [*Puts it in the hiding-place, which he closes.*] I am a rotten blackguard. Now then toss up. Heads, I go to the Isles of Greece. Tails, I join the Foreign Legion. [*Tosses.*] Heads, the Isles of Greece! Threes. [*Tosses again.*] Tails, the Foreign Legion. One all. [*Tosses again.*] Heads, the Isles of Greece! So be it.

[*He goes swiftly out, Back Right.*]

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,
Where burning Sappho loved and sung.

[*The light changes to darkness and moonlight as before, and the stage is empty. After some seconds the* MAN IN ARMOUR *says.*]

SIR TIRROLD

Another hour.

[*The ghost of* MELLONEY HOLTSPUR *enters as before from Front Left.*]

MELLONEY

That is what happened in this room twenty-two years ago at this time of the year. I cannot get away from it. Lonny! Lonny Copshrews! No. He has never been here since. [*She comes right down to Centre Front.*] I think that a strange thing is going to happen here, for there are colours and sounds. And Bunny is troubled. It can only mean more unhappiness; for only the sad thing happens here. There is a noise of wheels, too; the living must be coming back. It is my sister Julia, with Bunny.

[*She draws back Front Left, then off.* BUNNY'S *voice is heard off, saying.*]

BUNNY

Kezia has left the things here, Mother!

[*Enter* LADY MENTO.]

Just wait till I switch on the lights. [*He turns on all the lights.*]

JULIA

Only this one light, Bunny; my eyes are tired.

BUNNY

Right-ho! [*He switches all off except a green-shaded one, Right.*] Now sit you down. —

Hullo! here's a note for you, marked "Urgent."

[JULIA *sits in chair, Right.*]

Will you have soup or coffee, Mother? Oh, dash! I'm making a filthy mess of this.

JULIA

Soup, please.

BUNNY

This seems to be soup, and here's a biscuit. I'm going to have coffee. [*He pulls up a chair beside his mother, to Left of her and slightly below her.*] Anything serious in the note, Mother?

JULIA

Yes. Mrs. Trenchard is very much worse. She wants to speak to me before she dies. I wonder why. I must go down before breakfast. They've been good tenants, the Trenchards. Minnie Trenchard — she used to be so pretty. I'll leave word that I'm to be called at six. I must be back early, for the Jones children will be here at ten, and Miss Copshrews at eleven. [*Goes Right, then returns.*] And how does the dance seem, in memory, Bunny?

BUNNY

It was a clinking dance.

JULIA

Is Miss Copshrews a . . . clinking partner?

BUNNY

She is. Mother, you knew Miss Copshrews' father, the painter. Wha. was he like, exactly?

JULIA

That portrait.

[BUNNY *examines the portraits.*]

BUNNY

Mother, you know, these two portraits are amazing. I agree with Edward Boveney; Laurence Copshrews was "as great a painter as any we have had."

JULIA

He shocked me, I must say.

BUNNY

Mme. Copshrews, his widow, married again last week.

JULIA

I saw that.

BUNNY

Do you know why she left him?

JULIA

I should say that the main cause was Laurence Copshrews, day in, day out, for the year or so they were married.

BUNNY

I think he was ill, Mother. He died within four years of the parting.

JULIA

The Laurence Copshrews of this world, Bunny, don't stand the strain of any real relationship; friendship, or partnership or marriage. Under their intellect, there is nothing that you can trust. [*She rises and comes to table, Centre.*]

BUNNY

You don't mind Miss Copshrews coming, Mother?

JULIA

She seems a nice young woman. I shall be glad to know her better. I did not like her parents.

BUNNY

I am very glad that she is coming, Mother.

JULIA

Yes, Bunny. I want you always to be glad, Bunny.

BUNNY

Thank you, Mother. Mother, I saw Edward Boveney there this evening for a minute. He said that Laurence Copshrews' best works were small paintings of the Arthur story, which he had seen, but which have absolutely disappeared. I wondered if they could possibly be here, stored away somewhere.

JULIA

Your Father went through everything when your Grandfather died. He found no paint-

ings except these and those that were burned. There were some unimportant letters from Laurence Copshrews. Your Father burned them.

BUNNY

I wish that they had not been burned. Too much has been burned. I would like this house to have all its records that Laurence Copshrews came here.

JULIA

Does not Miss Copshrews know about the paintings?

BUNNY

No.

JULIA

The French woman may have them.

BUNNY

Edward Boveney says not.

JULIA

Lonny left them in Greece, then.

BUNNY

I hoped that they might be here somewhere.

JULIA

They're not.

BUNNY

This is a strange house, Mother. A lot of Holtspurs have lived and died in it. It must be full of us. I sometimes wonder if they don't take a part in our lives.

JULIA

We know that they do not, Bunny.

BUNNY

I know, Mother. But you are used to this house. I'm only just beginning to realise it. It holds all the secrets of all the Holtspurs for four hundred and fifty years. I wonder if there are any secret rooms!

JULIA

You'll find nothing romantic here, Bunny. Some of the romance went when water was laid on, and more when electric light was installed, but the last went when we put in central heating. The ghosts are all laid and the skeletons are all buried.

BUNNY

But there is romance, Mother. And the most romantic painter of modern times was here, and to-morrow his daughter will be here.

JULIA

I wonder, will she find romance here, Bunny!

BUNNY

I wonder that too, Mother.

JULIA

Good-night, my dear boy. Will you switch on the stair lights, and then put out?

BUNNY

Yes, Mother. Good-night.

JULIA

[*Moving off Right.*]

Good-night.

BUNNY

[*Alone.*]

Lenda — Lenda Copshrews. . . . This place seems full of the Holtspurs. . . . Who is that there?

[MELLONEY *enters noiselessly from Left to the back of stage.*]

Midnight fancies! [*He switches off the last light.*] It's time for bed. [*He moves off Left across a dark stage, crooning.*]

The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day,
And Harry the King is gone a-hunting,
To bring a deer . . .

[*A door shuts. Presently the clock strikes three.*]

SIR TIRROLD

Another hour!

MELLONEY

[*Comes down the stage in moonlight and sings in a little low voice.*]

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment,
Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.

Curtain

ACT II

ACT II

The same.

[JEMIMA JONES (*fourteen*) *in a chair Left.* PETER JONES (*fifteen*) *reading a folio in a chair Right.* MARIA JONES (*twelve*) *heard off, trying to pick out a tune on the piano with one finger.*]

JEMIMA

Maria, do stop that noise. Lady Mento doesn't like it.

MARIA

You know quite well she's gone out. She can't hear.

JEMIMA

Well, I can. So stop. Peter! [*No answer.*] Peter! Peter! can't you answer?

PETER

Oh, shut up!

JEMIMA

No, but Peter —

PETER

What d'you want?

JEMIMA

Where's Susan?

PETER

Gone upstairs. [*Relapses to book.*]

JEMIMA

I say, Peter. Peter!

PETER

Why don't vou have the nerve killed, or have it out?

JEMIMA

I want to ask vou something.

PETER

Well?

JEMIMA

Peter, how are you enjoying this?

PETER

This place do you mean, or your conversation? I'm not enjoying your conversation.

JEMIMA

This place, of course.

PETER

It's a jolly fine place, and this is a frightfully interesting old book about it.

JEMIMA

Let me see.

PETER

It's a cut above your sex. It's mostly in Latin.

JEMIMA

Oh, we all know you're in the Sixth! But it's all in writing, Peter.

PETER

Of course, you can only read print; I forgot.

JEMIMA

I read a jolly sight more improving books than you do. I'll bet this is immoral, or you wouldn't like it so. I'll —

MARIA

Chuck it, you two; here's Bunny.

[*Enter* BUNNY, *Right.*]

PETER

Hullo, Bunny! Is it lunch time?

BUNNY

Getting on. Is my mother back yet?

JEMIMA

She's still with poor Mrs. Trenchard. She said don't wait.

BUNNY

Has Miss Copshrews come yet?

JEMIMA

Lenda? No. She telephoned. She won't be long.

PETER

How did the sketch go, Bunny?

BUNNY

Pretty fair. It's in the studio, if you'd like to see it.

PETER

I'd like to see it. [*Rising.*]

JEMIMA

You'd better get ready for lunch first, Peter.

PETER

[*Going Left.*]
So'd you. I don't take quite such hours to tidy as you do.

JEMIMA

No, you never wash.

PETER

I don't. [*Goes to door.*] I bathe. [*At door.*] Squish! [*Exit. Then returns and says.*] Jemima! Squish!
[*Exit.*]

JEMIMA

You pig! Come back and shut up your book. He always leaves his books about.

BUNNY

What is it? Oh, the Holtspur Book again. Our old manuscript. I can't follow most of it.

MARIA

Peter says *he* can.

JEMIMA

He would. He's always swanking.

MARIA

You swank yourself

JEMIMA

Not more than anybody else.

MARIA

Yes, you do.

JEMIMA

No, I don't.

MARIA

You do.

JEMIMA

Who says so?

MARIA

Everybody says so.

JEMIMA

There's no such person as everybody, so there. So squish flat. Now go and tidy, because I've got to see you tidy.

MARIA

It isn't time yet.

JEMIMA

Yes, it is. Isn't it, Bunny?

BUNNY

Getting on, I should say.

MARIA

I'm going to play "Holy, holy, holy" first.

JEMIMA

No you are not to, Maria.

MARIA

Yes, I am.

[Runs off Right, and there is a squabble and banging of the piano.]

JEMIMA

[As the notes of "Holy, holy, holy" rise.]

That's very, very irreligious, Maria. You naughty little thing!

MARIA

I'll spit if you come any nearer. [*They are heard disputing away to the Right, off.*] I can spit jolly straight.

BUNNY

[*When the noise dies.*] Oh, Lenda, come soon, come soon! I cannot bear this waiting. [*Goes to portrait Right.*] Lenda's father. The profile's like her. [*Comes down.*] She will be here now at any minute. Was that the car? No, I don't think she will have me. I'm such a duffer. [*He sits on table Centre and looks Right.*] Listen. No, it is not she. What shall I do if she won't have me? I don't think I'll want to live.

[*Enter the ghost of* MELLONEY, *Left.*]

[BUNNY *comes right down stage.*] I used to mock at people being sick with love, but I don't mock now. I pity poor women in love. If it's like this to me, who am a man, what must it be to them?

[*The stage darkens.*]

I can't live in this state of suspense. Who is that there? Is that you, Susan? [*Looks up, Left.*] I thought I saw someone. No, there's no one.

MELLONEY

Courage, Bunny.

BUNNY

Courage! Courage! But what use is courage in love?

MELLONEY

Love is courage.

BUNNY

This thing is driving me mad. I keep thinking I hear a voice.

[*Exit* MELLONEY, *Right.* SUSAN (*eleven*) *entering, Left.*]

SUSAN

Hullo, Bunny! [*Enters Left.*]

BUNNY

Oh, Susan, my dear, come and keep me company. Where have you been?

SUSAN

Having a lovely time.

BUNNY

What, all by yourself?

SUSAN

No, indeed.

BUNNY

But the others have been down here ragging. Were you with Kezia?

SUSAN

No, I was with the lovely lady.

BUNNY

Oh! which lady is that? Do you mean my mother?

SUSAN

No. That. [*Going to* MELLONEY'S *picture.*]

BUNNY

That?

SUSAN

Yes. Didn't you see her?

BUNNY

I? Just now, do you mean?

SUSAN

Yes. I heard you talking to her.

BUNNY

I was talking to myself.

SUSAN

She said she was going to comfort poor Bunny. Did you want to be comforted?

BUNNY

What on earth does the child mean? Comforted? One has bad moods sometimes. Tell me about this lovely lady.

SUSAN

No.

BUNNY

Do, Susan. Why won't you?

SUSAN

I'm too happy.

BUNNY

That's jolly. Happy at being here?

[SUSAN *nods.*]

You must come here often then.

SUSAN

I was always afraid of coming before, but not now; it's such a happy house. You see, it's her home.

BUNNY

The lady's? Yes.

SUSAN

I never knew where she lived till to-day. Were you ever ill here, Bunny?

BUNNY

No, I've never been ill. And I've only lived here a little while.

SUSAN

When I was at home I was ill once and had to live in bed — scarlet fever. Oh, it was lovely at nights! She used to come to sit by my bed and put her arm round me.

BUNNY

Was that the first time you ever saw her?

SUSAN

Yes, but of course I always thought of her, before that; ever since I can remember.

BUNNY

And then, when you had scarlet fever, she came?

SUSAN

Oh, I was glad when she came, for of course when she was there the little devil-man couldn't tickle me.

BUNNY

Did he, before?

SUSAN

He tickled me and tried to put me down the well.

BUNNY

But she stopped that? That must have been blessed.

SUSAN

That wasn't the blessedest thing. That is when she sings. When she sings, all the dear little bunny rabbits come out of the wall, and the dear little robins, and all the people who live here — I don't mean you, but Him.

BUNNY

The man in the picture?

SUSAN

No. He doesn't; but the man in armour does, and he puts back his helmet and opens his side, and the man in the red coat comes, and all the others who live here.

BUNNY

All to hear the song? What song does she sing?

SUSAN

I shan't tell you.

BUNNY

Oh, Susan! won't you tell poor old Bunny?

SUSAN

No. Unless you promise not to tell.

BUNNY

I won't tell.

SUSAN

Promise.

BUNNY

Faithfully.

SUSAN

Clean potato; deal with you forever?

BUNNY

Clean potato; deal with me forever.

SUSAN

It's a very religious song about a prophet.

BUNNY

Has it a name?

SUSAN

Yes. The Seer Demur. Seer means a prophet, 'cos I looked it out.

BUNNY

Yes. And what does the Seer Demur do in the song? What does the song mean?

SUSAN

It hasn't got a meaning; it's religious like in church.

BUNNY

Ah! yes. And has she been singing to you to-day?

SUSAN

All the time, Bunny. Oh, Bunny, I think something very important is going to happen, 'cos I'm so happy.

BUNNY

I think so, too, my dear.

SUSAN

Haven't you heard her singing?

BUNNY

No.

SUSAN

But listen. She's singing there.

[*Very faintly off, Left, the voice of* MELLONEY *is heard, singing.*]

MELLONEY

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment,
Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie.

[*A door shuts and kills the noise.*]

BUNNY

That's the voice that I used to hear when I stayed here when I was little . . . and then, just now.

SUSAN

This is a very, very, very happy house, Bunny.

BUNNY

I hope it always will be, Susan.

SUSAN

Bunny, do you think I could kiss the lovely lady? [*Going back.*]

BUNNY

Kiss a picture, my dear? I wouldn't.

SUSAN

You would; for I saw you kiss that little one on your desk this morning.

BUNNY

Oh! You see too much. Well, kiss her, then.

SUSAN

[*Kissing portrait.*]

Good-bye, lovely lady. Now here's Kezia, to make me wash my hands for lunch.

[*Enter* KEZIA, *Left.*]

KEZIA

Now, come along, Miss Mischief, to wash those little puddocks.

SUSAN

[*To her fingers.*] Mr. Long Larder and Miss Etty Bodkin, you must come and be washed.

[*Exeunt Left. When they have gone,* BETHIA *enters Right.*]

BETHIA

[*Speaking to someone still off.*]

I'm afraid her ladyship hasn't come back yet. Oh, Master Bunny; it's Miss Copshrews, Master Bunny.

BUNNY

Oh, I say! thank you, Bethia. Talking to Susan, I never heard your car. Come in! Come in!

[*Enter* LENDA COPSHREWS, *Right. She is tall, dark, quick, with a fine kindling profile and lion-like carriage of the head. Enter silently, behind* LENDA, *the ghost of* LONNY COPSHREWS. *He remains at Back Right,*

while LENDA *comes down stage to shake hands Right Centre with* BUNNY.]

LENDA

How do you do . . . Bunny?

BUNNY

Well, Lenda; I am glad to welcome you here at last.

LENDA

I'm sorry to be late; I punctured.

BUNNY

Mother's gone to see an old tenant who is ill. She will be back directly. She'll be grieved not to be the first to welcome you. We'll be lunching in a few minutes. Would you like to go to your room?

LENDA

Thank you, but not for just one minute, Bunny. I'd like to take it all in.

BUNNY

Do you remember this room?

LENDA

I remember the man in armour. Or I think I do. It is like a memory of a dream. Was my father often in this room?

BUNNY

Often. He didn't draw here, because of the light. I'll show you where he drew later on. It was in the North Room, my grandfather's study, where the pictures were burned. But he was in this hall often. This is his portrait,

Lenda. [*He unhooks it and brings it down for her to see.*]

LENDA

So that is the portrait. It is one of his best.

BUNNY

It is like you, in a way, in profile.

LENDA

Poor father!

BUNNY

I'll put it on the table, while I fetch you the other; the one of my aunt. This is the one he did of Aunt Melloney. [*He brings it down stage to her, to her Left.*]

LENDA

It is very beautiful. A different type from your mother, Bunny. I've known this face all my life. My grandfather always kept a photograph of this Miss Holtspur on his desk.

BUNNY

They were great friends. And she saw you often when you were little.

LENDA

I wish I could remember her, Bunny.

BUNNY

Can't you?

LENDA

No. Except that, standing here, I have a sort of memory of someone in white standing by the man in armour. But I wasn't three when I left here, Bunny.

BUNNY

I know. You know, Lenda, I can't remember her, but I have a sort of memory, like yours, of someone in white, here, singing a plaintive song. Do you remember Kezia Spinfield, our old housekeeper?

LENDA

No.

BUNNY

She remembers both you and your father. Of course she was here then. You must talk to her about him.

LENDA

It is wonderful to be here, where my father was. It means more to me than I can say.

BUNNY

Lenda, this portrait of your father ought to belong to you. We've no right to it. I want you to let me give it to you. Will you? To mark your first coming here?

LENDA

Oh, Bunny, no. But how beautiful of you to think of it! You say you have no right to it. He thought you had. I was reading his papers only this morning. He calls this the only place where he had ever been happy. These things were his thanks to you.

BUNNY

Mayn't they now be my thanks to you, Lenda, for all the happiness you've brought to me?

LENDA

I couldn't take them, Bunny; they belong here. We'll put them in their places.

BUNNY

Oh, Lenda, dear, don't cry, dear!

LENDA

I'm not crying, Bunny. It's only a little gush of pity that he was only happy here, though he could do these things. Is this how the hook goes? No, there.

BUNNY

It is the one boast of this house that he was happy here, Lenda.

LENDA

The world was hell to him, all through his life; and through fire and chance and fate his best works are lost, and yet the world calls him "a wasted life."

BUNNY

Is not that what happens with all great work? Only half is allowed. The powers of evil prevent more.

LENDA

The powers of evil are in men and women, Bunny. It is the poor thing in us that makes poverty.

BUNNY

Ah, Lenda! I feel that there are powers of good and evil always outside us, ready to enter in. But I know one thing, Lenda, that

it is the glorious thing in you that makes me glorious. I've felt like a man transfigured ever since I saw you first. I know I'm not clever like you, nor wise, nor beautiful, nor anything, but all there is of me just worships you. I love you down to the depths, Lenda.

LENDA

You should not have said that, Bunny.

BUNNY

What? About depths?

LENDA

Yes, for I'm my father's daughter. There are depths in me.

BUNNY

And if there are, I'll love you for them and beyond them.

LENDA

I believe you would, and it's very sweet to be so loved, Bunny. But you ought not to have depths in your life, Bunny; only heights and happiness.

BUNNY

I know what I want in life. You. I've never been in love before. I know I never can be again. I know I'm not good enough for you. Who can be? Who could be? It isn't always merit that decides this, thank God; that's why I speak. If you can't have me, you can't, and I won't ever even speak of it again. I didn't mean to now. It's a

mean advantage when you are my guest. Only you're too beautiful not to upset me, after I've been waiting all these hours. So there it is, beloved, and God bless you.

LENDA

Yes, there it is, Bunny; as you say.

BUNNY

I didn't think you could care for me, Lenda; that was too mad a hope.

LENDA

Bunny, have you been suffering like this ever since we met?

BUNNY

Yes, though it has been happy suffering.

LENDA

Ever since the Wrocester Hunt Ball?

BUNNY

Yes. You came into the ball-room in white, with that sparkle thing in your hair. You came with the Colways, and looked round for someone.

LENDA

And that was the end of your peace?

BUNNY

I don't call it that. I say it was the beginning of my glory, for to love you is glory enough.

LENDA

And then Mrs. Boveney introduced you.

BUNNY

Yes. God bless her.

LENDA

I pray God bless her, too, Bunny, for the same reason.

BUNNY

You mean it has meant a little, even to you?

LENDA

It has meant more than a little to me, Bunny.

BUNNY

Lenda darling, I know you won't torture me. How much more has it meant?

LENDA

I think it has meant just everything, Bunny, since first I looked into your eyes.

BUNNY

Then you care for me, Lenda, as I care for you?

LENDA

Not care for you, Bunny; I love you, my darling.

BUNNY

Oh, Lenda, my beloved!

LENDA

It's too great joy, isn't it?

BUNNY

Almost. It's the greatest joy that ever could be. Oh, Lenda, you are marvellous! [*Gazing.*]

LENDA

My little Bunny!

BUNNY

I wish I could see my image in your eyes.

LENDA

Your image is in my heart, beloved.

[*They kiss and then kiss again.*]

BUNNY

And how are we to come back into the world, after that?

LENDA

With a new heart and new eyes.

BUNNY

Please God, this old hall will be happy to you as it was to your father. I think this old house must be glad of our joy, Lenda. All the fifteen generations of Holtspurs must have felt, as we feel, in this hall. They must be here still.

LENDA

And perhaps my father, too. I hope so.

BUNNY

I hope so, too. And what we hope, comes.

[KEZIA SPINFIELD *enters, Left.*]

KEZIA

Mr. Bunny, little Miss Susan says you promised to blow her some bubbles while she is washing her hands.

BUNNY

I did. I'll come, Kezia.

KEZIA

She says she'd come herself to call you, but she's all soapy.

BUNNY

Lenda, I don't think you've met our old friend, Miss Kezia Spinfield. Miss Copshrews, Kezia.

[KEZIA *mumbles.*]

LENDA

Why, you're the kind friend who gave me the sugar-candy on little bits of string. I've thought of you so often. How do you do?

KEZIA

I'm very well, I thank you, Miss Copshrews.

BUNNY

Well, you will talk about those old times while I blow Susan some bubbles. I won't be a minute.

[*He hurries off, Left.*]

LENDA

Is Moo-moo alive, still?

KEZIA

You mean Myrtle West, Miss, that used to be the under-housemaid here?

LENDA

Yes. I always called her Moo-moo. I couldn't say Myrtle. She used to give me rides round the garden.

KEZIA

No; she is dead, Miss.

LENDA

Ah! How did she die?

KEZIA

She got into trouble, Miss, and perhaps it was better as it was.

LENDA

Where is she buried?

KEZIA

In the waste bit at Naunton Crucis, for, you see, Miss, she took her own life, before her child was born.

LENDA

And they would not bury her in the churchyard?

KEZIA

No, Miss.

LENDA

The brutes! I'll go to-morrow and put flowers on her grave.

KEZIA

God has done that, Miss, for poor Moo-moo, for every year her grave comes up with the crocus, and afterwards the wild forget-me-not. And the little daisies are as many as stars.

LENDA

Poor Moo-moo! There was no harm in her; nothing but fun. She was like a happy bird, singing. Do you remember my father coming here, and painting?

KEZIA

Yes, Miss Copshrews.

LENDA

I never knew my father. Can you tell me something about him, some memory of him, so that I can think of him here?

KEZIA

Yes, Miss Copshrews; I can.

LENDA

That will be beautiful to me, if you will.

KEZIA

I knew your father, Miss Copshrews, as a servant knows a visitor; without any pretence. God forgive me and him and all of us, but he brought nothing but evil upon this house.

LENDA

Evil? How?

KEZIA

It is over, Miss Copshrews, as far as evil can be; with the people dead. But even poor Myrtle West was due to him.

LENDA

That is nonsense; he died while she was still here, and he was dying for a year before that.

KEZIA

Miss Copshrews, long before your father's death he brought a French friend here, a Doctor Remy. They used to go sketching together. Afterwards the Doctor was often

here, staying in the village. He was a young man and a handsome man, and he flattered the girl with painting her portrait, and brought her to the grave.

LENDA

But how can you say that that was due to my father?

KEZIA

Miss Copshrews, if I'm uncharitable may God forgive me, but where the teaching errs, the heart strays. Like master, like pupil, in this world, Miss Copshrews, and like father, like child.

[*Enter* LADY MENTO, *Right.*]

Miss Copshrews, my lady.

[*Exit Kezia, Left.*]

JULIA

Ah, Miss Copshrews, so you are here! I have been to see an old tenant who is ill. Has no one welcomed you? Was not my son here?

[*Enter* BUNNY, *Left.*]

BUNNY

Yes, I was here, mother; but I've been blowing bubbles for Susan. How is Mrs. Trenchard, Mother?

JULIA

Very ill and wandering. She hasn't spoken to me yet. I must go there again after lunch, in case she should speak before she dies. Miss Copshrews, this is a very funereal welcome.

It is black like the day. Will you come with me, now, so that I may show you your room?

LENDA

Thank you.

BUNNY

Mother, before you go, I must tell you that I've asked Lenda. here. to marry me and we are engaged.

LENDA

Will you trust your son to me? I love him very, very dearly.

BUNNY

And I her, Mother.

JULIA

My dear, and Bunny. I hardly know what to say, though I supposed that something like this might happen. I had hoped to have my son a little longer. Women cling to their possessions, looks, lovers and sons; time takes them all; time and other women. You are very like your father, whom I knew a little.

BUNNY

Won't you kiss her, Mother?

JULIA

That is your province to-day, my son. I have just come from the presence of death, and, I am afraid . . . of sin, and I am wondering at the meaning of it all, and whether there be a meaning. Will you come then, child?

LENDA

Won't you call me Lenda?

[*They begin to move off to the Right.*]

JULIA

Lenda. Is that from the Spanish word that means pretty?

LENDA

It was a name my father chose. It means me.

BUNNY

To me it means Everything.

[*They go out. It darkens. When they are gone, the ghost of* LONNY COPSHREWS *comes down to the table, Centre, while the ghost of* MELLONEY *advances up towards the table.* MELLONEY *is singing.*]

MELLONEY

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment,
Chagrin d'amour —

[*She sees* LONNY.] Lonny! Is that you, Lonny?

LONNY

Yes.

MELLONEY

What are you doing here?

LONNY

I've come here with my daughter.

MELLONEY

Your daughter, that you robbed me of. How dare you enter this house?

LONNY

I am with my daughter everywhere.

MELLONEY

You are richer than I. I am with my misery everywhere. And you come back to taunt me.

LONNY

I come back because my daughter is going to marry Bunny.

MELLONEY

Marry Bunny? Never! She shall not.

LONNY

They love each other, and there are the marks of happy love on both of them.

MELLONEY

Your touch has done evil enough in this house. It shall not taint Bunny.

LONNY

I want that old stain washed away by their happiness.

[MELLONEY *laughs.*]

Is it not time?

MELLONEY

Time? So, because suffering has gone deep for twenty years, it should be forgotten? How will their happiness wash away what you have done to me? I was young. I was strong. I might have borne children and been happy and fulfilled myself. You broke me, body and soul. Now I am this. I had never

known that there could be people like you in the world. How could I? And all my love, all that was beautiful in me, all my morning, all my pride, for I used to be proud, were just nothing to you. I might not have had them. They weren't what you wanted.

LONNY

That is not true.

MELLONEY

What do you know of truth? It is true.

LONNY

I cared for nothing but those things, but I was a dirty hound none the less.

MELLONEY

And you went on, just the same, as though nothing had happened. Any other woman would have done, as well as I, who used to be Melloney. And since then you have had your daughter, and I nothing but suffering, a going down into the grave and walking in the body of death. But you shall now meet your punishment from this House that you have wronged.

LONNY

How can you punish me?

MELLONEY

Thus. Come, all of you, dwellers of this House. And you, the founder of the House, Sir Tirrold Holtspur.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

The Hour is come. For many years, the thoughts of justice spread the nets of justice in the hearts of men. Now the nets have brought you to the judgment and punishment of your sin.

LONNY

I am already judged and punished. I am in hell.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

How?

LONNY

I know, now, that I might have been a great artist, and was not, through my own fault.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You have been punished for your sin towards yourself, not yet for your sins to others. This might have been a happy woman, and was not through your fault.

LONNY

I behaved to her with every infamy.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Her suffering has bred kites to tear your infamy.

LONNY

And they have torn me.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Not yet to the inmost soul.

LONNY

What worse suffering can they inflict?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Your sin will be worked out on those you love.

LONNY

I love her. [*Indicating* MELLONEY.]

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You love your daughter.

LONNY

She is a child.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Sins are visited upon children.

LONNY

If that be so, do not boast of it.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

I tell you the law. You will suffer through her, in the way decreed.

LONNY

Two things will annul your decree. First, her innocence.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Innocence is the sword to guilt. What is your second thing?

LONNY

My virtue, which must atone for much.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

What was this virtue?

LONNY

This, that for all my wickedness, I cared for truth and beauty and colour; three things which have never let man down. I was taunted and despised. I was ragged and

starved. But I called those things noble with all my strength, all my life long.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Of those things you made a bondage for your soul, so that you were blind to reality.

LONNY

What is reality?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

The godhead of man. The brotherhood of man. The communion of spirits.

LONNY

Words.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Pain shall make you see. [*He moves back to his place.*] Your punishment begins.

LONNY

I will think my own thought in spite of every devil and every angel.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You shall weep your sin. In spite of every virtue and every love.

LONNY

I weep my sin in my own hell. Nothing that you can do can touch me further.

MELLONEY

Your sin, finding you out, shall touch you further.

LONNY

My shame, for what I did to you, is pain enough, Melloney.

MELLONEY

It is not pain enough for me, viper.

LONNY

Pour me poison, then, that I may drink.
[*Enter* LENDA *from Left Back. She comes down stage, Right.*]

MELLONEY

This is the cup of your bitterness. [*She stares at* LENDA, *then moves away, Left Back, silently.*]

LONNY

Lenda. Lenda.
[*She is unconscious of his presence. She picks up a book from the table, Right. A gong is beaten off, Left.* LONNY *moves away, Right Back.* BUNNY *enters Left Back. The children enter from all points.*]

BUNNY

Ah, Lenda. Now come along, you people.

LENDA

How dark it is. It is going to thunder.

BUNNY

It is going to pour.

PETER

"A rain in May makes good June hay."

SUSAN

There! Look at that! Lightning!

JEMIMA

[*Counting.*]

One, two, three, four. It's not very near. Five, six, seven.

[*There comes a crash of thunder with a spotting of rain.*]

Curtain.

ACT III

ACT III

The same.

[PETER *and* SUSAN *enter, Right Back. They come down Front.*]

PETER

Now, Susan. This is what I want to examine. [*Goes to* MAN IN ARMOUR.] I believe there's treasure buried inside this old geezer-gee.

SUSAN

Oh, Peter, how heavenly!

PETER

What else can this poem in the book mean? [*Reads.*] "Sir Tirrold Holtspur to all his House:
Holtspur, if thou beest ruinate, still trust
In my right arm to raise thee from the dust;
More than the half I tell thee, which, if 't fall
As 'tis most like, thy wit shall madrigal."

SUSAN

It's a very geezer-gee-ish poem.

PETER

Of course it is. He wanted people to think it tosh because it's a hint where the treasure is buried. "Trust in my right arm." The right arm's the clue. [*Climbs on a chair, Right.*] I can't see all his gauntlets, he's gripping his horn so hard.

SUSAN

Is there a secret spring?

PETER

I haven't spotted one yet, but live and learn. I say: some stuff, this armour. Jolly useful kit for Rugger. He doesn't seem to have any give anywhere.

SUSAN

Jab him in the plexus. [*Climbing up.*] Try that knobby thing.

PETER

[*Trying.*]

No. Besides, that isn't on his arm.

SUSAN

How did he scratch when he tickled?

PETER

I expect he Keating'd up, so as not to have to. Give the bolts a jab. No. They don't seem to move at all.

SUSAN

Try the floppy thing on his elbow.

PETER

[*Trying.*]

No. I expect it would be some quite small thing like a nut.

SUSAN

Try up at his shoulder.

PETER

I tried all his shoulder first thing. Hand up that tumbler with the paraffin. [*Takes and oils armour.*]

SUSAN

Peter, the place will stink of paraffin for weeks. What are you doing?

PETER

It'll soak in or evaporate. It'll oil up his joints. Then we'll come back presently and have a go with a screw-driver. Then he might open.

SUSAN

Oh, hooray!

PETER

It won't be hooray, I'm afraid. The old geezer-gee's a wash-out.

[*Enter* MARIA, *Left, on tiptoe.*]

MARIA

Oh, Peter, have you found it?

PETER

No, not yet.

MARIA

I expect it's been found, long ago. Bunny said they'd searched.

PETER

I'll just lie down and squint up. I say, he's jolly well dripping paraffin, like billio. It's not *in* him.

MARIA

I expect it's a wash-out. Come on out.

SUSAN

Just let me have a go.

MARIA

I'm afraid it's no go. Do you see anything, Susan?

SUSAN

Only pools of paraffin.

MARIA

Well, come along out. He's a dud.

PETER

I'm afraid so. Where's Jemima?

MARIA

Gone to the Woman's Institute.

PETER

She would. Well, he's a dud. Did the papers come?

MARIA

Yes.

PETER

Anything about the Rushton case?

MARIA

Oh, yes, Peter; they've found the body.

SUSAN

Oh, hooray! Where?

PETER

Was it murder?

MARIA

Yes. She'd been flung down the well. And they found the hammer that did the deed. There's a heavenly picture of the hammer.

PETER

Come on; let's come and see.

SUSAN

And then let's go out and go on with our cave in the shrubbery.

MARIA

Yes, let's. Come on, Peter.

PETER. All right. I've bagged some wire to keep up the sides.

SUSAN

Come on. It will be simply heavenly.

[MARIA *and* SUSAN *skip off Left Back.*]

Come along, Peter, before Jemima comes back.

PETER

I'm just coming. [*When they are gone, he says.*] By Jove, it might not be his arm. It might be the Holtspur cock's arm, in the crest up above. A jolly good idea. I'll give it a good old prod with the poker. [*Does so.*] No. Nothing doing. But I'll give it another prod. [*Does so.*] That sent the plaster down inside somewhere. [*Gives a third prod.*] Golly, I nearly had the whole thing down. No more.

[*He puts down the poker and exit Left. As he goes out, the panel joggles slowly down, opens the hiding place wide, and then very slowly joggles up and shuts. It does this with a rhythmical, distinctive noise.* [BUNNY *enters Right Back.*]

BUNNY

No. She is not here, Mother.

[*Enter* JULIA *Right Back.*]

JULIA

Just call her, will you, Bunny? She must be with the children. [*She goes to table, Centre.*]

BUNNY

[*Calling Left Back.*]

Lenda!

LENDA

[*Off.*]

Yes.

BUNNY

Can you come to us for a moment? We are in the hall.

LENDA

[*Enters Left Back.*]

Here I am. Oh, Lady Mento. I hope that your tenant is better.

[MELLONEY *enters at Left Back and remains there during the scene.*]

JULIA

Poor Minnie Trenchard can never be better in this world, my dear child. She cannot live through another day, and it is better so. I have talked to her and she is easier in her mind. I would like now to speak to you.

LENDA

Certainly, Lady Mento. Shall it be here?

JULIA

Yes. I have had a very terrible day. It is about your father, Lenda, that I wish to speak to you. Bunny, I am very tired; will you bring me a chair here to the table?

[BUNNY *brings chair.*]

Thank you, Bunny. [*She sits.*] [*To* LENDA.] Minnie heard, somewhow, that you were to be here, and that led to her sending for me. It is strange. She had not meant to tell me much; but in the thunder this afternoon she heard as it were a voice commanding her to tell everything. So she has spoken out her heart.

LENDA

Will you tell me, Lady Mento, who this Mrs. Trenchard is, or was?

JULIA

She is the widow of James Trenchard. She farms her late husband's small farm at Knott Green here. She *was* Minnie Bracknell, once maid to old Mrs. Holyport at Nap Hill.

LENDA

Thank you.

JULIA

You know that as your father was unlike other men in intellect, so he was in other ways.

LENDA

Yes, one sees that from his face.

JULIA

No doubt. Since you know that, you may perhaps be prepared for the confession which was made to me to-day.

LENDA

I hope so, Lady Mento.

JULIA

I trust so. Your father came to know Mrs. Trenchard, then Minnie Bracknell, after his return from Greece. It seems that they lived together at Tatchester for some months, unknown to anybody here.

LENDA

If they cared for each other, Lady Mento, I am glad that they had that happiness.

JULIA

It was no happiness, Lenda. Sin cannot bring happiness in this world.

LEND

Forgetfulness then.

JULIA

Forgetfulness of much that none should ever forget. While they were living thus, your father told his companion that he had often been in this House and had searched it for secrets, apparently in order that he might turn them to account.

LENDA

What were the exact words used, Lady Mento?

JULIA

That was the exact meaning.

LENDA

It is important to me, Lady Mento, that the exact words should be given, so that I may know the exact charge made.

JULIA

These were the words — "He told me that he had often searched Holtspur House for secrets that he might use." I will not be certain whether she said "he might use" or "might be of use." Remember, she is a dying woman and spoke with difficulty.

LENDA

I remember. Did she say that he had found secrets?

JULIA

Yes. He had.

LENDA

And used them, or abused them?

JULIA

My child, it is very painful to me to have to tell you that he abused them . . . terribly . . . in a terrible way.

BUNNY

Mother darling, shall we not let this old dead past be, and forget it and forgive it? All this cannot matter to any living soul now; it is long since utterly at an end. Lenda is our guest and my love.

LENDA

Bunny, dear, all this is very, very interesting to me. Let me hear it to the end. Will you go on, Lady Mento, if you are not too tired? In what way did my father abuse his knowledge?

JULIA

It is not easy for me to tell you.

BUNNY

It is not easy for Lenda to listen.

JULIA

No, my dear boy, it is not. And this that I have to tell you will be more bitter than anything that has gone before.

LENDA

Let me hear it then, and know the worst.

JULIA

It seems that many years ago, when your father was painting those portraits, he discovered from some book, evidently the Holtspur Book here on the table, the whereabouts of a secret hiding-place in which a former Holtspur had hidden family jewels. Your father boasted to his accom— companion that those jewels which he had found had been "as good as the bank to him."

LENDA

Meaning that he had stolen and sold them?

JULIA

I know no other interpretation that can be put upon such words.

LENDA

Let that be the interpretation. The woman is dying and speaking the truth.

BUNNY

But is that so, Mother? She is at the point of death, and speaking from memory of a time long past, and, as you said just now, she was in some hallucination, thinking that she heard voices.

JULIA

Unfortunately, her statement seems to be borne out by these papers which she gave me. These are two inventories of jewels in the handwriting of Sir Jotham Holtspur, who wrote this book. On each inventory is a note in your father's hand. "Got for this lot £127.10, Buck and Littlewick." On the other, "Fetched only a hundred guineas. Binfields." Both notes dated twenty-seven years ago.

LENDA

[*Comparing the script with the book.*] Yes. Sir Jotham wrote the inventories and I think my father wrote the notes.

BUNNY

But, my dear Mother, that doesn't prove that the jewels existed, or that they were found

here or sold, or that Mr. Copshrews sold them, or that he stole them if he did sell them. If he did sell them at all, it was probably as Grandfather's agent. He was always buying and selling pictures and things for Grandfather, and got a commission for doing so, and jolly well deserved it. The commission on these two sales, if they were sales, would have been about £24, or quite "as good as the bank" to an artist under twenty-five.

JULIA

Your defence occurred to me, Bunny; but your Grandfather kept exact accounts of all such commissions in these private journals. No such transactions as these two are mentioned in these volumes here.

LENDA

Did Mr. Holtspur, your father, ever mention the jewels?

JULIA

Never. I am certain that he never knew of their existence.

LENDA

Let us call this Non Proven for the moment. I will thrash it all out with the buyers, if they can be traced. Binfields, you said, and Buck and Littlewick.

BUNNY

Buck and Littlewick are art dealers in Ryder Street, St. James's.

LENDA

Good. So my father lived in sin, and may or may not have stolen the plate. Was any other charge brought against him?

JULIA

Yes.

LENDA

May I hear it?

JULIA

Yes. While he and Mrs. Trenchard were living thus, they became short of money. Your father was not then working at his profession. Bunny, will you draw the curtain from your Aunt Melloney's portrait?

[*He does so.*]

That is my dead sister, Melloney, who was at that time living here. It seems that she cherished some affection for your father and that your father knew this . . .

LENDA

Yes, Lady Mento?

JULIA

And presumed upon it.

LENDA

In what way did he presume upon it?

JULIA

By sending his companion to her for money to relieve their want.

LENDA

Which she granted?

JULIA

Three times, to the extent of more than one hundred and eighty pounds.

LENDA

And what happened then?

JULIA

Your father fell ill and he and Minnie parted. Mr. Boveney found your father and cared for him until he died. Minnie came home. Presently young James Trenchard married her, knowing nothing of all this till long afterwards, when it hastened his end, poor man.

LENDA

I wish that Mrs. Trenchard had sent for me, to tell me all this.

JULIA

She sent for me, Lenda, because she felt that a wrong had been done to this house.

LENDA

By my father?

JULIA

I do not say by your father; by the two of them together.

LENDA

And I am afraid that you feel that too, Julia.

JULIA

I feel only miserable.

LENDA

It is miserable that the child of such a father should enter this house . . . on other terms.

JULIA

My dear, whatever my feelings may be, I have laid the case before you fairly, without prejudice, without passing judgment.

LENDA

Why did you lay it before me?

JULIA

It was the dying woman's request that you should know.

LENDA

Did the voice bid her?

JULIA

So she said, and believed. And it is better that you should know. And surely better that you should know that I know.

LENDA

You are not wholly displeased, Lady Mento, that these revelations should come, at this time?

JULIA

There were objections to your engagement to my son before these revelations were made to me.

BUNNY

None that will have any weight with me, Mother.

JULIA.

Yes, Bunny, objections that must have weight with you. We are now poor, and your father's firm is involved; you must marry

wealth, or work to restore it. You have talents, and I mean you to have a career, apart from this trivial painting and philandering. My son's honour is pledged to this house.

LENDA

And my honour is pledged to him.

JULIA

That being so, it is for him to be scrupulous towards you. He has no means and no profession, and obligations elsewhere.

BUNNY

Mother, that is true of nine out of ten young men. Every man is a waster till he marries. I shall work for Lenda.

JULIA

At what?

BUNNY

I shall go into the firm.

JULIA

That, my son, I think you will not be able to do if you marry Miss Copshrews.

LENDA

Why not, Lady Mento?

JULIA

It would not seem to me to be fitting.

LENDA

Lady Mento, I am poor, by worldly standards, but I am no beggar and I am not a fool. I count myself a fitting match for any man in this kingdom.

JULIA

I do not say that you are not; far from it. But I heard even now something more about your father which makes you no match for my son.

LENDA

And this something you have kept as a trump card.

JULIA

I dearly hoped, Lenda, not to be forced to repeat it.

LENDA

You have few sins left to repeat, Lady Mento. What is the *bonne bouche?* I hope a good one. His vices are not grand hitherto. Did he murder?

JULIA

Not with a knife or poison, but by subtler wickedness. I know now that in the eyes of God he was the murderer of my sister Melloney, whose love he won and whose heart he broke wantonly and wilfully, a few months after his marriage to your mother. Now I understand my poor sister's wretchedness and death. Knowing this, it is impossible for me to receive you as my daughter.

LENDA

Lady Mento, I am very proud of my father. He was not a normal man; I know that. He was weak, he was wicked; very wicked, if

you like. I should not wonder. From the time he was born he had no help, no guidance; nothing was done for him, nothing was smoothed for him. He fought and suffered from boyhood on. In spite of all that, he was one of the best painters of his time. I say that that eminence points to greatness of soul, whatever sins he did. And I'd rather be his daughter than a crowned queen. Do not speak to me now, Bunny; do not touch me. I have been here too long. My place is with that poor woman, who is the last soul on earth who loved my father. If they will let me, I will be by her till she die.

[*She goes off, Right.*]

JULIA

So, my son, we come to the parting of the ways.

BUNNY

Yes, Mother.

JULIA

Will you too go to Mrs. Trenchard's, to this cast mistress of a thief?

BUNNY

Don't hit below the belt, Mother. I haven't gone, for your sake.

JULIA

Thank you, Bunny.

BUNNY

Thank me? For failing my love?

JULIA

For not breaking your Mother's heart, Bunny.

BUNNY

The past only exists as somebody's prejudice.

JULIA

That is so, my son. Bunny, my dear, what will you do, my darling?

BUNNY

Mother, I think you'd better not talk to me for the moment, any more.

JULIA

Very well, Bunny. [*She comes towards him.*] My dear boy! My dear boy! [*She kneels suddenly and kisses his hand.*] You don't know how I love you.

BUNNY

Mother, if I did not know, do you think I would have kept silence, as I have? Come. We will not talk of this. You must rest.

JULIA

Rest? While a murderer's daughter takes my son.

BUNNY

She is not that. Do not you call her so.

JULIA

He killed my sister, after robbing her. Can you marry her, knowing that?

BUNNY

Marry her? Surely you see that Lenda will never marry me after this.

JULIA

Women are not so sensitive where their love's concerned.

BUNNY

Not sensitive? To outrage?

JULIA

Bunny, my son, this is the only shadow that has ever come between us.

BUNNY

This is more than a shadow, Mother. Why did you let her come here?

JULIA

So that I might watch her with you.

BUNNY

But why tell her all this?

JULIA

In justice to my dead sister, whom I feel to-night like a living soul, outraged by Miss Copshrews' presence here. Then from my love for you, that would screen you from the taint of that leper.

BUNNY

That leper, as you call him, kindled the souls of thousands by the purity of his thought.

JULIA

And blasted all who touched him.

BUNNY

Perhaps, Mother, that is what great motives do. They blast people. Your great motives have blasted her to the heart and me, too.

JULIA

Bunny. Bunny. That is not true, my boy.

BUNNY

It is true. You have parted us. She will leave this house to-night. Well, I shall leave it to-morrow.

JULIA

Oh, Bunny, where will you go?

BUNNY

That cannot matter, I should think.

[*He goes out Back Right.* JULIA *stands like one stunned, then comes down stage blindly.*]

JULIA

When we lay them in the cradle for the first time, we know that some day this will happen.

[*She goes out Front Left.* MELLONEY *comes down from Left Back.*]

MELLONEY

O blessed heaven, it is sweet to see her thwarted. She has it to the heart now. She will not glory again in her father. If I might do one thing more to them! If I might wreck these paintings, which make his fame! Then I might rest, then I might rest. [*She moves off to the Centre, down stage.*] Here is this little child. She might help me.

[*Enter* SUSAN, *Right Back.*]

Susan, my little one! [*She goes Left, by fire.*

SUSAN

Ah! It is the lovely lady. Yes?

MELLONEY

Come to me by the fire here, to watch the sparks. [SUSAN *goes*.] You love watching the sparks, don't you?

SUSAN

Yes. I love it awfully much.

MELLONEY

Don't you love them when they cling to the chimney?

SUSAN

Yes, when they breathe on the soot.

MELLONEY

What do you mean by "breathe on the soot"?

SUSAN

There. When they glow out and then glow in. It's like a snake, breathing.

MELLONEY

Or like armies of little glittering men.

SUSAN

Or little butterflies flying away home.

MELLONEY

They aren't green enough for glow-worms. Do you see cities in the coals?

SUSAN

Cities all made of white gold.

MELLONEY

What a pity that we have not some salt to make lovely blue flame!

SUSAN

Oh, I love blue flame!

MELLONEY

Yes. Isn't it beautiful? But other things, besides salt, will make coloured flames. Shall we make some?

SUSAN

Oh, do let's! What can we use?

MELLONEY

It's such a long way to the kitchen for salt, but won't you go to fetch a piece?

SUSAN

Couldn't we make some with something here?

MELLONEY

The cover of that magazine, perhaps.

SUSAN

No, that's Jemima's. Besides, the thick paper spoils the fire so.

MELLONEY

I know what we could use.

SUSAN

What?

MELLONEY

Will you unhook that picture and bring it here? [*Points Right.*]

SUSAN

[*Unhooking* LONNY'S *portrait and bringing it.*] Here it is.

MELLONEY

That is the very thing.

SUSAN

Do you mean the frame?

MELLONEY

No, the whole thing. It's only an ugly old thing, and quite time we had a new one. It will make marvellous flames.

SUSAN

All blue and green, like salt does?

MELLONEY

Yes, and perhaps scarlet too.

SUSAN

Will it really?

MELLONEY

Yes, indeed.

SUSAN

I would love to see scarlet fire. Would it be like Fifth-of-November?

MELLONEY

Yes, like coloured flares.

SUSAN

Oh, how lovely!

MELLONEY

Well, you put it into the fire and then you will see.

SUSAN

Won't the glass break and hurt me?

MELLONEY

No; it will crack; it won't fly out. It cannot hurt you. You see that place between the two logs? Put the picture into that. Shall I give you the word? One, two, three?

SUSAN

One, to make ready,
Two, to make steady,
And three, away?

MELLONEY

Yes. And then, at "three" the lovely scarlet flames will climb all over the logs.

SUSAN

What would make it go like that?

MELLONEY

There are chemicals in the paint. Now, one to make ready. What are you waiting for?

SUSAN

No. I'm not going to burn it, if there's chemicals in it.

MELLONEY

Why not, dear?

SUSAN

Peter put some chemicals in the fire once He set the house on fire.

MELLONEY

But these are not like those.

SUSAN

They might be. You can't ever tell, with chemicals.

MELLONEY

I can tell, my darling.

SUSAN

Father said, "No one can tell." He said, "We might have burned ourselves to little white bones."

MELLONEY

I will not let you come to any harm.

SUSAN

No. You put it on the fire.

MELLONEY

Ah, child, would that I could! There was a little boy here once who burned some pictures for me, in the other room. They were just like these pictures. They burned all up. They were not dangerous.

SUSAN

And were the flames lovely?

MELLONEY

Lovely. The loveliest flames I ever saw. The loveliest that ever were on this earth. But nothing to what the flames of these would be. You're not going to be outdone by a little boy, are you? I thought you were braver than that. Come, my darling, we'll burn the two pictures together. [*She moves to her own portrait.*]

SUSAN

No, no, no! You shall not burn my lovely lady. That's wickedness, awful wickedness. We might both be smitten dead, for burning you.

MELLONEY

Dead . . . smitten dead . . . Why?

SUSAN

Because it's a holy picture. You are an angel, Peter says. You are an angel, aren't you?

MELLONEY

No, my beloved one, I am very, very far from being that.

SUSAN

Then why did you come to me when I was ill-in-bed?

MELLONEY

Because your father wanted to marry me once, Susan. That couldn't have been, of course. But you might have been my darling little daughter if it had been. I shall always be tender to you because of that.

SUSAN

Aren't you tender to Peter and the others?

MELLONEY

They cannot see me, as you can. They have not the power.

SUSAN

But how can you go to the shiny place if you aren't an angel?

MELLONEY

I do not go to any shiny place, Susan, and the crowing of the cock is terrible to me. And I live here.

SUSAN

Yes, I know. But why don't I always see you?

MELLONEY

I cannot always come, except at midnight.

SUSAN

Because that's treasure time.

MELLONEY

There is no treasure here, my darling Susan; only old sorrow and old sin and old despair.

SUSAN

Oh, lovely lady, don't cry! I'll give you a whole kiss if you don't cry. I'll give you a kiss and a hug, and my Teddy bear Ed-a-ward.

MELLONEY

I'm not crying, darling.

SUSAN

You're the beautifullest lady. I want to say my hymn to you.

MELLONEY

Ah, little one! I am cast out from where they say hymns. But would you do something for me?

SUSAN

Oh, you know, you know I would! Anything in the wide world.

[*Enter, very quietly,* KEZIA, *at Left Back.*]

MELLONEY

Will you throw crumbs on my window-ledge, so that I may hear the little feet of the birds?

SUSAN

Is that all?

MELLONEY

No. If you could bring me snow-on-the-mountains, and forget-me-not, and dappled wallflowers, I would bless those holy flowers.

SUSAN

I will, I will; and Peter will.

MELLONEY

And never think of me again as an angel, Susan. I am only Melloney Holtspur, who cannot rest, who cannot rest. [*She begins to pass up Back Right.*]

KEZIA

Miss Melloney! Miss Melloney! Oh, my white flower, Miss Melloney! [MELLONEY *seems to try to answer. It darkens.*] Won't you speak to me? Say one little word. [*She seems to try to speak. It darkens.*] I'm old Kezia, my darling. [MELLONEY *vanishes.*] Oh, my Miss Melloney, come back out of the dead! Come back!

SUSAN

She can't always come, except at midnight.

KEZIA

That was my Miss Melloney, darling, that you were talking to.

SUSAN

Yes. She cannot rest.

KEZIA

"Let mine eyes run down with tears then, for the virgin daughter of my people is broken."

Curtain

ACT IV

ACT IV

The same.

[*On the table is a bowl of forget-me-not, snow-on-the-mountains, and dappled wallflowers. Midnight: moonlight and one light Right.* MELLONEY *enters Left Front and goes up Back Left.*]

MELLONEY

Nothing but this hate like a living thing. If a bird would sing to us. Or if we could pick a flower. Or if we could begin again, like the spring. But she is coming.

[*Enter* LENDA, *Right Back. She comes on and says.*]

LENDA

Bunny. Bunny. So he is not here waiting for me. Very well. I do not stay in this house. I will leave word and go. [*She sits at table and begins to write.*]

MELLONEY

I looked like that, felt like that, wrote like that. The world is gone from below your feet. All the trust in your soul is gone to hell-fire. Now, you part of him, you have it.

LENDA

There, there is what I think of them. [*She slaps down the letter on the table, rises and comes down.*] I do not care. I do not care. I belong with the artists, not with these, these properties. [*She goes swiftly up and off Left Back.*]

MELLONEY

Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment,
Chagrin d'amour dure . . .

[*As she sings,* LONNY *silently enters, goes down Right, and kneels in supplication facing Back.*]

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

What does this guilty one want?

LONNY

Mercy.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Had you mercy?

LONNY

No.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You are answered.

LONNY

I want mercy for my daughter. She should not bear my sin.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You sowed. You reap.

LONNY

Then I am in the lowest pit of hell.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You are in the pit you digged.

LONNY

No, but I did the crime. My daughter is innocent. . . . Innocent.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

So was your victim.

LONNY

I know it. Let me burn for it. Only spare that lovely little soul.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

We cannot.

LONNY

You can, you can.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

We are powerless. You set the wheel of the law moving. It has to go on, to fulfilment.

LONNY

But she may be crushed utterly by it.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

You will see your results.

LONNY

Then I have blasted her life.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Results come home.

LONNY

Then it is all doggery and devilry and there is no God and no mercy. And we are all mad dogs, mad as hell, biting. I could make a better world.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Your power to make is dead.

LONNY

Then I will unmake, till men blow out life like a candle and there are no men born to suffer.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Your power to unmake is dead.

LONNY

Then I will unsettle. I will be a dream and a madness in men's minds until they thwart this purpose.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Your power to unsettle is dead. All your powers, save one, are dead.

LONNY

[*Quailing.*]

What is that one?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

The power to suffer. You are in hell. [*A pause.*]

LONNY

I am not speaking from self, or vanity. I would not hide from her what I am. Let her know that I was the wickedest thing. Let her despise me. But let her not suffer because of me, because I cannot bear it, do you hear, I cannot bear it. I had rather be blasted out; annihilated.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

In hell, the worm is not annihilated; the fire is not blasted out.

LONNY

But the agony is, that you will not understand.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Understanding is forgiveness. You are not forgiven.

LONNY

No, but I want to save her; she is being punished for my sin and it is hell, hell, hell.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

This is hell.

LONNY

Then curses on this Life which can make such evil. May all this progress from the germ to man wither on its mud. May the moon blind it, and the sun blast it and some great blind star come down and crush it, crush it to pulp, to dust, to nothing. And let all the suns go out and the moons fall into them, and the space be empty, empty, with all of you gods and ghosts and fever and folly like the falling of the shadow of nothing. [*He seems to realize his hopelessness, and changes his tone. Feebly.*] No! No! I am talking folly because I am in such pain. Listen. It was said that there would be pity. If I might live again, suffering what you please,

would not that suffice? Would that not save her? Tell me what would save her.

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Atonement.

LONNY

Let me atone then. If one life of torment be not enough, let me have twenty lives. Let me be an artist or a woman for twenty lives, suffering day and night. Oh, what more could one do?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Atonement. [*He begins to go back into his place.*]

LONNY

Then let me suffer to the limit to spare her. Kind spirits, for God's sake let me spare her. She's not like me, strong to suffer; she's a little child. I know what I could do. Let my soul suffer in the bodies of animals forever and forever and forever; animals that are in the power of men; animals that men beat, or catch in traps, or love and forsake. [*No answer.*] Or let me be a bird kept in a cage. And see the sky through the bars. [*No answer.*] Then for the love and pity of the blessed God in heaven, tell me, tell me, set me my task of suffering!

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Atonement.

[*Silence. The* MAN IN ARMOUR *is in his place,* LONNY *is crouched on the floor to Right of table.* MELLONEY *enters down stage Left.*]

MELLONEY

Would you have spared me, Lonny, had you known?

LONNY

Yes.

MELLONEY

Some other woman would have served?

LONNY

No.

MELLONEY

It is a pity that you did not spare me, is it not? And you might so easily have spared me. You had your wife and daughter to turn to. And if you had spared me, none of all this would have happened. You might have seen your child so happy. Now you will see her with a broken heart. Oh, it is a joy to me to see you suffer! I have longed for it for all these years. You will see her suffer and I shall watch you. Oh, you devil! I am glad of this at last. And you will cry out to her; but she will not hear.

LONNY

No, she will never hear how I repent.

MELLONEY

You repent! You are sick that you should suffer, not for the sufferings you have caused. Here is your daughter, cut even to the heart by you. Now you will know yourself.

LONNY

Melloney, by the old love between us, have mercy on her. [MELLONEY *laughs.*]

[LENDA *enters Left Back, carrying a small bag. She goes to the table.*]

LENDA

Twelve hours ago. Just twelve hours. And now good-bye. I shall not see this place again. [*She unhooks her father's portrait Right and brings it to table.*] Good-bye, Father. Father, do not think I care for what they say. People loved you. And I love and honour you. And I think you know that. I think the dead are here. Father, if you are here in death, speak to me. [*No answer.*] There is some spiritual presence here. Is it you, Father? [*No answer.*] Spirit, Spirit, I charge you to speak to me.

[*Enter the ghost of* MINNIE BRACKNELL, *Right Back.*]

Is there a Spirit?

MINNIE

Yes. I am Minnie Bracknell, who died in your arms an hour ago.

LENDA

Is it well with you?

MINNIE

Yes.

LENDA

My father loved you. That was why I came to you.

MINNIE

I knew that, when you kissed me. But your father did not love me. I loved him. He loved one who deserved more happiness than she had.

LENDA

Miss Melloney Holtspur?

MINNIE

[*Indicating* MELLONEY, *who advances.*] She. [*To* MELLONEY.] You were the one her father loved. I was only one who was thankful for crumbs that fell from her master's table. I am happy that I loved him. You are sad. You thought him a mad child. I only loved him, even his madness and his childishness. You could have given him everything, and gave him nothing. I had nothing to give but my good name. Yet you loved him better than I.

If you had ventured to lift one finger, he would have been yours. You did not. So he made his mad marriage and then his mad breaking from it. Bad as I was, I gave him something.

But you were his love. Your soul was set for his soul from of old, only the wheels of his life were choked.
Oh, I am happy, happy, happy, to be set free.
[*Her face becomes radiant and she passes up the stage, Right.*]

LENDA

Oh, stay, stay; tell me of my father.
[MINNIE *goes out Right.*]
No, she is gone. She is gone. [*Runs to* MELLONEY.] What are you, there? For there is someone there? Are you she whom my father loved? [*No answer.* LENDA *leaves table and advances towards* MELLONEY.] No. There is nothing, nothing. Yet there was something.
[*The ghost of* MYRTLE WEST *appears from Left Back.*]
Who are you? Who are you, with the bright face?

MYRTLE

One who gave all for love.

LENDA

Myrtle? Myrtle West?

MYRTLE

I cannot speak; only thank you. Your father brought him to me. Your father was sent from God to change folk. A ship at sea at night comes in dark water. Then instantly the dolphins flash and it is all fire

instead of dark. So it was with your father. Beautiful fire.

[*She goes out in ecstasy, Front Left. Enter* KEZIA, *Left Back.*]

KEZIA

Miss Melloney.

LENDA

I am not your Miss Melloney.

KEZIA

Oh, Miss Copshrews.

LENDA

What brings you here at this time?

KEZIA

Hope to see one I loved.

LENDA

You find one you hate. In the morning, you will please give this letter to Lady Mento. I am going.

KEZIA

Miss Copshrews, I am an old woman who will not live to the lime-blossom. I have been called to my death this night. I have been a great sinner to you and yours. I thwarted your father here. I tried to turn Miss Melloney against him. I was bitter to you. I see now that he was not what I thought, but one of the broken panes that God's light shines through. And you are the fine spirit of a girl that, God forgive me, I tried to humble. Miss Copshrews, I ask you to pardon me. [*She kneels to* LENDA.]

LENDA

[*Raising her.*] I have been by a death this night. Our hates seem mean beside that. Let us be friends, Miss Spinfield.

KEZIA

Would I could ask pardon of your father.

LENDA

Artists do not hate persons but states of mind. He has forgiven.

LONNY

I have forgiven. Forgive me.

LENDA

Father! Father! That is my father.

KEZIA

I was a bitter sinner to you.

LONNY

And I to you. That is over, then.

LENDA

Father. I am your daughter. I am Lenda. Speak to me. Will you not speak to me?

LONNY

I am condemned.

LENDA

Father . . . where is your glory?

LONNY

Where I trod it.

LENDA

Father. None of me condemns you; only loves and understands. Can my love touch you, or my prayer help you?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

He is condemned.

LENDA

Till when?

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Until atonement.

LENDA

How can one atone? Oh, speak, speak. He longs to speak, and cannot.

KEZIA

He longs: he longs for something. [LONNY *stretches towards the table.*] You long for the flowers, poor human soul. [*She takes flowers and brings them down Right to him.* LONNY *bursts into tears.*]

LENDA

My father; my father. I will share your punishment. I will bear it with you. Only speak to me. Make me be near you.

[*There comes the first crowing of the cocks and* LONNY *dims away, struggling to answer. Enter* BUNNY, *Right Back.*]

BUNNY

Lenda. Lenda, my God, Lenda, I've been waiting all night outside the Trenchards' for you. How have I missed you?

LENDA

By Fate, I suppose. I came back by the lane.

BUNNY

My God, you've thought that I'd deserted you. I could stand it no longer at last. I knocked. They told me that you had gone. Lenda, darling.

LENDA

We are not alone here, Bunny. Kezia is here.

KEZIA

Master Bunny, and you Miss Lenda, I am going trembling, in a few hours now, to the presence of my Maker. All my days I have been among the Holtspurs. I have held their babes and laid their dead and their bread has been my portion. If an old woman may be forgiven, Master Bunny, I pray that all beauty and all bounty and all blessing be upon your marriage forever [*she starts to go off Right*] and forever . . . and forever.

[*She goes off, Back Right.*]

LENDA

Our marriage is less likely to happen than was thought.

BUNNY

Lenda, my beloved, I'm half mad from the want of saying this: Don't think that to-night can alter me.

LENDA

To-night has altered me, Bunny. I'm my father's child. You put him from this house.

BUNNY

I did not, Lenda; never. Nothing can change my praise of your father.

LENDA

Your mother did.

BUNNY

She is shocked to lose me, and upset by the deathbed. She will love you.

LENDA

She will not have the chance. When she put my father out, she put me. She thinks my presence here an insult to this house. It will be soon removed.

BUNNY

Lenda, my sweet, we seem caught in the net of old sorrows. Don't let them break all our hearts. Before all this I felt I'd die if you couldn't love me, but I'll kill myself if you throw me now.

LENDA

My father begged and stole from your mother's sister.

BUNNY

I don't care.

LENDA

I do. I will send a cheque for that when I have arranged. And I will trace those jewels.

BUNNY

What do those things matter? Our lives together is our task.

LENDA

Our lives together, in this house, with my father's sin rising up between us?

BUNNY

This house is an evil old coffin full of dead.

LENDA

It was he who brought the dead.
I think justice is done now. He spurned your aunt. Your mother has spurned me. So I will go. Good-bye. God bless you, Bunny. [*She turns to go out Right, but stays at table.*] This letter that I wrote to your mother, I'll tear it. It was all bitter. Tell her that I will write. Tell her, whatever my father did, I've paid, Bunny. Oh, Bunny, Bunny, I love you, Bunny. I wish I might die. There. It is at an end, now. [*She rises.*]

MELLONEY

[*Going to the Left of the table.*]
Ah, no, no. You must not part from each other. Let the old sin be; it has been punished enough. I have been punishing your father in my heart for all these years, yet wanted more vengeance still. You love each other. That atones for all the old sin and wipes it away. Oh, be happy, you two young things, while it is hawthorn with you. Bunny, my beloved, give me your hand. And you, I loved your father once; no, I love him still. I give you your lover's hand. Take it from

me. I will love you too, my child, that should have been my child. I will pray for all lovely things for both of you.

[*She places the lovers' hands in each other and slowly goes off Front Left. The lovers look at each other. The hiding place at back gives a click and slowly joggles wide open. Enter from Right Back,* JULIA.]

JULIA

My dears, you here? What does this mean? Yet the strange thing is, I knew that I should find you. I've had a marvellous dream about my sister Melloney. It was as though she was at my side. She has made me see the right in this matter of your marriage. Lenda, my dear child, I want you to take my son. See, I give him up to you. Will you come into my heart, my daughter? There is room for you, my dear. [*She takes* LENDA.]

LENDA

Thank you. Thank you.

BUNNY

Thank you, Mother.

[*The children come in, led by* SUSAN.]

JULIA

[*Turning to* CHILDREN.] But you, my dears, what brings you out of your beds at daybreak?

SUSAN

We've had dreams, too. Look, Peter. Look!

PETER

The hiding place, wide open. What's in it? The treasure.

SUSAN

What is it?

PETER

Drawings — paintings. Bring them to the table. Here's a portrait of Kezia. "My last drawing. L. C."

SUSAN

Give it to Kezia. She longs to have a portrait.

PETER

Lenda, these are your father's missing paintings.

BUNNY

They are.

LENDA

They are, indeed.

SUSAN

There's something else in the hiding-place. It is boxes!

JULIA

These are Sir Jotham's jewels. With a note from your father. "I pawned these and then redeemed them. Laurence Copshrews. May the House of Holtspur forgive me."

BUNNY

The House of Holtspur does forgive him.

JULIA

We will carry these things to my room, where there is a fire.

[*They move off Back Right, led by* SUSAN, *singing.*]

SUSAN

The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day,
And Harry the King
Has gone a-hunting,
To bring a deer to bay.

The east is bright, with morning light,
etc., etc.

[*After they are gone,* LONNY *comes down Centre Front and crouches and sobs.*]

LONNY

I flung away life and power, when I did not know what they were. Now I have neither, forever, and forever, and forever.

[*Enter* MELLONEY, *Front Left: she comes down Centre, left of Table.*]

MELLONEY

Lonny! Lonny Copshrews!

LONNY

I do not know where to hide.

MELLONEY

[*Holding out her arms.*]

Hide here, Lonny.

LONNY

I am unworthy to touch the hem of your garment.

MELLONEY

And yet you love me.

LONNY

No one can love twice. I've always loved you.

MELLONEY

And then a darkness fell upon you, Lonny.

LONNY

No darkness; a sin, my sin.

MELLONEY

We were made for each other, from of old, we two, and have been through a dark time apart. But the night is over now, Lonny. Won't you come into the light with me?

LONNY

My sin was against the spirit that makes the light.

MELLONEY

It is forgiven, by that spirit.

LONNY

Then I think all suffering must be at an end throughout the world.

MELLONEY

Forever and forever and forever.

[*They draw together and become transfigured as they kiss.*]

THE MAN IN ARMOUR

Another death is dead!

Curtain

Note.—The persons and events described in this play are imaginary. No reference is made to any living person.—JOHN MASEFIELD

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